CONSTITUTING *BROKEBACK MOUNTAIN*(S):

RHETORICAL STRATEGY IN THE LGBT MOVEMENT

by

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(Under the Direction of Christine Harold)

ABSTRACT

This project contributes to the study of modern social movements by analyzing two strands of rhetoric around the movie *Brokeback Mountain* and their implications for the LGBT movement. I identify the key distinction as one of rhetorical strategy as opposed to an ethical orientation for which Michael Warner has argued. Through close textual analysis, I outline the limits and possibilities of both assimilationist and integrationist rhetoric as strategic options for LGBT advocacy. I argue that rather than privileging one over the other, a more effective political discourse must be self-conscious of the strategic value of any given rhetoric.

INDEX WORDS: *Brokeback Mountain*, Gay, Lesbian, LGBT, Rhetoric, Public Sphere

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

CHAPTER

1 RHETORICAL STRATEGY AND IDENTITY IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE.....1

Rhetorical Strategy in the LGBT Movement 3

Discursive *Brokeback Mountain*(s) 12

Publics and Cultures: Framing a Political Rhetoric 14

2 ASSIMILATING *BROKEBACK MOUNTAIN*: STRATEGIC CONTRADICTION FROM THE MARGIN.....23

The Early *Mountain*: Universalizing as Political Tactic 25

The *Mountain* Grows: Redefining Success at the Cultural Shift 36

Conclusions 44

3 GO BLOG IT ON THE *MOUNTAIN*: INTEGRATIONIST RHETORIC AND THE POROCESS OF CIRCULATION.....48

Circulating Integrationist Rhetoric.....50

Blogging as Medium and Genre.....62

Integrationist Rhetoric.....70

Conclusions 91

4 DEFYING TELOS: IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS OF THE DISCURSIVE *BROKEBACK MOUNTAIN*(S).....93

Rhetoric, Public Sphere, and Subjectivity 94

LGBT Movement Rhetoric 99

Implications for Rhetorical Theory 104

REFERENCES 107

CHAPTER ONE

RHETORICAL STRATEGY AND IDENTITY IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE

> *ACT UP demonstrations are theatre outside the bounds of the physical theatrical space. They are theatre in the world, and accomplishing the types of reactions, actions and catharsis that all people in the "conventional theatre" only dream about. We use the same tools, however. Research, intensive pre-production planning, bringing together the actors (demonstrators), rehearsing them and getting to their motivating emotions (anger, fear, loss, love for each other), sets, props, fundraising, publicity--all this for the single goal of creating a spectacle that will change people's lives and change the world.*
>
> Jon Greenburg, "ACT UP Explained" (1992)

> *HRC seeks to improve the lives of GLBT Americans by advocating for equal rights and benefits in the workplace, ensuring families are treated equally under the law and increasing public support among all Americans through innovative advocacy, education and outreach programs. HRC works to secure equal rights for GLBT individuals and families at the federal and state levels by lobbying elected officials, mobilizing grassroots supporters, educating Americans, investing strategically to elect fair-minded officials and partnering with other GLBT organizations.*
>
> Human Rights Campaign, "Mission Statement" (2007)

Far more than simply 15 years separate these two quotations. The first, from ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) activist Jon Greenburg, describes the group's tactic of creating "zaps" (theatrical demonstrations designed to garner media attention by disrupting corporate offices and political events, often forcing politicians to take a stand on LGBT issues).[1] This was an important part of the overall strategy of "direct action" also upheld by a few other groups in the early 1990s such as OutRage and Queer Nation. Their actions took urban space and mass media as primary contexts. Explicitly designed for the purpose of eschewing traditional activism engaging state-mediated action, zaps seem almost antithetical to the decidedly corporate-sounding mission statement from the

[1] Zaps were pioneered by an earlier group the Gay Activists' Alliance, but popularized in larger groups such as ACT UP.

Human Rights Campaign (HRC). HRC is primarily a political fund-raiser which seeks change through the very lobbying techniques rejected by ACT UP. They track political and corporate support of LGBT issues and focus public pressure on those that fail to meet its standards for inclusive policy. They release reports detailing companies' degree of inclusion based on various measures of equality.

Both in tone and approach, these two rhetorics appear to have little in common beyond the overarching goals to improve the lives of LGBT people. Yet each achieved a status as the most prominent LGBT rights organization in the United States in its own time (ACT UP in the late 1980s and early 1990s, HRC from the 1990s to today). To the extent that the above statements exemplify a major shift in rhetorical strategy for the LGBT movement at large, activists are left with several important questions: What changes have occurred in the movement? Why did they happen? What have we lost? What have we gained? What possibilities remain unexplored? How has the media landscape influenced these changes and what innovations continue to affect it? What rhetorical distinctions exist today? This thesis begins with those questions and will outline the limits and possibilities of two major strands of rhetoric in the contemporary LGBT movement.

My analysis centers on an exploration of two distinct rhetorical strategies as they occurred in the discourse around the popular movie *Brokeback Mountain* by supporters of LGBT rights. The large amount of extant discourse generated by this movie makes it an ideal case to look at rhetorical practice and to judge the relative values of different approaches by highlighting the specific strategic qualities of rhetoric. By identifying the limits and possibilities established by each rhetoric, I argue that a more effective and

enabling political rhetoric for LGBT lives must be self-conscious of its specific strategic value. In addition to laying out the strategic significance for LGBT movement rhetoric, my analysis supports movement toward a reconceptualization of the contemporary public sphere as articulated within rhetorical practice rather than outside of it. Finally, I explore the relevance of process to rhetoric as it plays out in the strategies explored in this project.

But before I can advance such an analysis, I begin this initial chapter by laying out the stakes. First I introduce the two types of rhetoric explored in this project, assimilationist and integrationist rhetoric. I locate them within social movement theory and against competing conceptions of LGBT movement rhetoric in particular. I then outline my conception of *Brokeback Mountain* as discursively constituted rather than as a stable text. Finally, I locate myself in contemporary public sphere theory in order to properly situate the political implications of LGBT rhetoric.

Rhetorical Strategy in the LGBT Movement

Within contemporary social movement rhetoric, a consistent trend has emerged. Multiple, contradictory problems force movement leaders to adopt similarly contradictory rhetorics. Herbert Simons was one of the first to address this topic. Writing in 1970, Simons applies sociological research on movements to argue for a "leader-centered conception of persuasion in social movements" (1999, p. 386). Looking at rhetorical leaders from the anti-war, Civil Rights, and other movements, Simons distinguishes two types of leaders: the reformer and the revolutionary. While both seek to end deprivation or oppression, "the reformist urg[es] change or repair of particular laws, customs or

practices, the revolutionary insist[s] that a new order and a vast regeneration of values are necessary" (p. 387). This is an important distinction and one that certainly holds true for the texts under examination through this project on the LGBT movement.

Yet Simons' focus on leaders leads him to set up a standard for evaluation that I find unsuitable for more fragmented and mediated contemporary movements. After delineating a list of what he calls "incompatible" demands placed upon movement leaders, Simons highlights the important contribution of both reformist and revolutionary rhetoric in order to satisfy all expectations. However, in the end this leads him to valorize an "intermediate" approach as a way to resolve these dilemmas without creating new ones inherent to the two more radical approaches, "espousing militant [revolutionary] demands in the value language of the established order or militant slogans in behalf of moderate [reformist] proposals" (p. 392). While this sounds reasonable, I find it too restrictive for the modern discursive field. By focusing on leaders only, positive evaluation is located only in rhetorically overcoming the conflicting obstacles. But as modern movements do not speak with a singular voice and have ever increasing opportunities for grassroots-level action, this model seems inadequate. Simons does acknowledge the "essential functions" (p. 393) performed by both types of rhetoric, but they are still subsumed under a conception of intermediate strategies as ideal. In this project, then, rather than call for a compromise between two incompatible rhetorics, I argue that each must become more attuned to its own strategic limits and possibilities in order to successfully capitalize on rhetorical success.

When it comes to rhetoric supportive of the LGBT movement around *Brokeback Mountain*, I use the terms assimilationist rhetoric for the reformist and integrationist

rhetoric for the revolutionary strategies. Michael Warner has written much on political rhetoric in the LGBT movement and describes a similar distinction. In his book *The Trouble with Normal* (1999), Warner argues that the movement has lost much in forgetting the more radical (queer) strategies of early groups such as ACT UP. Specifically, he sees the current trend (continued still today by groups such as the HRC) as embracing a more liberal identitarian politics and what he calls lesbian/gay politics. He finds this problematic because such rhetoric draws on enlightenment values of universal humanness which include a great deal of normalization. In other words, lesbian/gay rhetors take heterosexual culture and its institutions as their frame of reference, not queer culture and its established ethics and aesthetics. In the case for same-sex marriage as a priority of the movement, for example, this means that success is measured by gaining access to a heterosexual institution (marriage) rather than by expanding the cultural notions of what count as acceptable forms of relationships deserving of rights. In other words, lesbian/gay rhetoric is universalizing in that it incorporates a normalizing push toward values of heterosexual culture as commonly applicable.

Warner is critical of this strategy. To the extent that this push for marriage is "a massive repudiation of queer culture's best insights on intimate relations, sex, and the politics of stigma, then the campaign is doing more harm than marriage could ever be worth" (p. 91). Warner, rather, seeks to address both politics of sexual shame and to challenge institutional hierarchies such as marriage (p. 74). He sees this refusal to repudiate sex as "the antithesis of identity politics" (p. 75). The result is that Warner locates the key distinction between advocates wishing to gain marriage rights for gay men and lesbians and those wishing to reform the institution of marriage as a "difference

in ethical orientation" (p. 75). While Warner makes several important observations, especially concerning the normalizing institutions of heterosexual culture, I differ from his analysis of the rhetorical distinction within the LGBT movement in a few key ways.

Instead of an *ethical distinction* being of primary importance (although it is important) I place the key difference on the level of *rhetorical strategy*. To explain that distinction, let me now clarify the difference between what I call assimilationist and integrationist political rhetoric. While often used interchangeably, there are important and distinct qualities of these terms which I want to highlight. The *American Heritage Dictionary* (2000) defines assimilation as "The process whereby a minority group gradually adopts the customs and attitudes of the prevailing culture." Integration, rather, is "The bringing of people of different racial or ethnic groups into unrestricted and equal association, as in society or an organization; desegregation." Basically, it is the difference between the melting pot and the tossed salad conception of American diversity. Assimilationist approaches seek the same rights for LGBT people as heterosexual people and couples, thus privileging heterosexual culture as a priori to any queer cultural modes of being. This means extending current institutional rights and responsibilities; most prominently at the moment is a push for recognition of same-sex marriage. Integrationists seek equal recognition for LGBT people in society, but the goal is not assimilation into mainstream culture. Rather, they seek to maintain a unique subculture of queerness while still demanding equality within mainstream democratic institutions. Importantly, while the approaches to achieving their goals will differ, there is often some overlap in the goals themselves. For example, some integrationists may call for recognition of same-sex marriage as a matter of principle and progress, but not as an exclusive end as an

assimilationist might.[2] At no point do I presume to claim these two approaches are mutually exclusive; in fact, as I will enumerate later, I believe both are necessary and work best in concert.

Now that I have identified the basic premises behind assimilationist and integrationist political rhetoric, let me compare them to Warner's political dualism of queer versus lesbian/gay rhetoric. In *Publics and Counterpublics* (2002), Warner describes queer rhetoric as seeking to eliminate the heterosexual couple from its privileged position as normative referent for all sexual culture as well as the hegemonic institutions of normalization which support it (p. 187). As Warner sees it, popular 1990s organizations such as ACT UP, OutRage, and Queer Nation had queer politics at heart. This queer activism functions in Warner's political landscape of publics and counterpublics, which I outline later. Queer counterpublics respond to mainstream publics using techniques of informal representation (such as the zaps described above), rejecting traditional channels and state institutions. A queer agenda sought to transform society on a fundamental level and its techniques reflected that. For example, Queer Nation is credited with the first successful large-scale reclamation of the word "queer" with their now-famous slogan, "We're here. We're queer. Get used to it!" They focused on transforming structures of homophobia on fundamental levels; when violence against LGBT people happened, Queer Nation could be expected to organize massive protests recasting queer people from victims to subjects in their own right chanting "Dykes and Fags Bash Back." This is fundamentally different from an integrationist approach as it

[2] For example Wendy Brown (1995) acknowledges the historical significance of political cultural contexts in which rights hold emancipatory value, yet wants to critically explore the paradox of legitimation and regulation that comes with them. In this sense, an integrationist rhetoric may call for same-sex marriage while simultaneously critiquing the regulatory limits of institutionalized marriage.

tended to be separatist in nature. Although Warner dislikes the assimilation/separation dualism (p. 74), when the focus is moved from the ethical to the rhetorical, this distinction retains important insight. For Queer Nation, the focus was not on integrating LGBT and straight culture in a collaboratively elaborated world (as Warner seems to support for his understanding of queer rhetoric). Rhetorically this political slogan sought to create a new (separate) world for queer people with a "live and let live" attitude. In contrast, integrationists seek a place in the existing world, albeit a self-defined one. In other words, integrationists seek a protected *subculture* with a voice in mainstream institutions; queer activists seek a political *counterculture* and a transformation of mainstream institutions to queer standards. This may be a slight distinction, perhaps, but important nonetheless when considering how to apply one's rhetoric to political practice.

Lesbian and gay rhetoric, as described by Warner, is founded on the liberal subject and enlightenment equality. As enlightenment thinking retains a foundationalism which allows for certain exclusions to be maintained regarding what qualifies as the universal human identity, it has been implemented in the past to support slavery and counting blacks as ¾ human. Yet it is this conception of a universal human identity equally deserving of basic human rights (including legal protections and opportunities) which leads to a minority-rights discourse seeking access to the same rights as whites or heterosexuals, such as marriage. While this lesbian/gay rhetoric is more similar to my assimilationist rhetoric than the previous pair, there is still a slight difference in that assimilationist rhetoric does not have to be founded on liberal humanist identities—even if it most often is. For example, one could call for adoption rights based not on the idea that it is a human right that LGBT people deserve, but because LGBT people want to

adopt children in order to conform to their own conceptions of a family (or lack thereof) that is equally viable with regard to the rights constituted in this society as a mark of inclusion. This is a key distinction as Warner's queer rhetoric can at times be considered assimilationist.

Although I emphasize differences between my assimilationist and integrationist and Warner's queer and lesbian/gay categories, I do not deny that each may exist within certain contexts and there are perhaps possibilities of collaboration and overlap among the four. Indeed, Warner even remarks at the overlap between queer and lesbian and gay activists, describing them as context-specific (2002, p. 213). For example, in some contexts, one could have a call for assimilation based on queer identity. Similarly, both queer and integrationist politics have a transformative quality. Perhaps strangely, queer rhetoric could also be considered assimilationist to the extent it can be understood as an attempt to assimilate mainstream culture into queer ideals; reverse assimilation is still assimilation under this standard. In the end, forcing clear cut distinctions between the four approaches might even be more limiting than not recognizing the distinctions at all. Nonetheless, I will restrict my attention to assimilation and integration because I believe this relation—a distinction of strategy—demonstrates the most relevant limits and possibilities for the LGBT movement as it stands.

Warner's depiction of queer versus lesbian/gay rhetoric lays the key distinction as an ethical quality of refusing/embracing sexual stigma (*Trouble with Normal*), rejecting/implementing identitarian politics (*Publics and Counterpublics*), and relation to the state and other publics (*Publics and Counterpublics*). He claims the difference is "not simply strategic because each posture toward the state and toward the public sphere has

strong links with a different rhetoric of identity and sexuality" (2002, p. 212). This is where we differ. Without going so far as to say his analysis is wrong, the locus of analysis is too important to accept as received knowledge. Therefore, as I will argue, I believe the key distinction between rhetorical options in the present LGBT movement is better located at the constitutive level of rhetorical strategy. Different worlds are constructed by assimilationist and integrationist rhetoric. Proper attention to the co-constitutive function of rhetoric and the rhetorical situation will provide new insight in both the limits of these political rhetorics and our understanding of the public sphere itself. Rhetoric constitutes the possibilities for identity, so it is fundamentally rhetoric that must be strategically charged.

For Warner, queer rhetoric acts as a counterpublic and lesbian/gay rhetoric as a public, yet he claims LGBT people *are* a counterpublic regardless of rhetorical choice and trying to act like a public by dealing directly with the state is reductive (1999, p. 140). Here is part of why even queer rhetoric becomes a sort of identity politics, as Warner evokes an essential identity to explain queerness. This is not the only understanding of a counterpublic, however. Robert Asen (2002) offers a definition of *counterpublic* in the sense of imagining communities, "As a critical term, 'counterpublic' refers to those publics that form mutual recognition of exclusions in wider publics, set themselves against exclusionary wider publics, and resolve to overcome these exclusions" (p. 358). Asen draws critical attention to the fact that the traditional use of counterpublic attempts to refer to excluded *people* (as Warner does in the reference above), rather than excluded *identities*. Instead, Asen draws more multiplicity from the term, "Counterpublic loses its critically illuminating force if it refers to excluded people

per se…. Invoking counterpublic in this manner would reduce the term to the identity of particular participants and presume a shared set of interests among people who may not see themselves as allies" (pp. 358-359). Basically, a counterpublic is a constitutive force founded not on any materialist conception of exclusion (although that is important), rather it works in the realm of imagination and is constituted by the very discourse it circulates.

Barbara Biesecker (1999) calls on scholars to be especially mindful of these constitutive functions of the rhetorical situation. Biesecker rethinks the rhetorical situation in light of Derrida's concept of *différance* in order to depart from a materialist conception of rhetoric (such as the excluded *people* of Warner's claim). Basically, she argues that as in traditional models of the rhetorical situation, "if we posit the audience of any rhetorical event as no more than a conglomeration of subjects whose identity is fixed prior to the rhetorical event itself, then we must also admit that those subjects have an essence that cannot be affected by the discourse" (p. 233). In other words, if rhetoric is not constitutive, then the whole realm of identity is excluded from its reach—a conclusion she is not willing to accept. Instead of looking at the rhetorical situation as structured by a logic of influence (which necessitates a discrete subject), Biesecker argues for its understanding within a "logic of articulation" (p. 242). Subjects are articulated through their encounter with the rhetorical situation. Subjects do indeed have identities (gay, male, black, etc.) but these are products of discourse, not essence. Any community associated with an identity is therefore deeply invested in that discourse. If we must look at discourse as co-constitutive with a community and its rhetoric, then we can only look at any text as constructed. In the next section I outline a discursively

constructed conception of *Brokeback Mountain* as an event articulated in discourse rather than just a stable text.

Discursive *Brokeback Mountain*(s)

In this project I look at discourse surrounding the movie *Brokeback Mountain* as an important instance of LGBT political rhetoric. After garnering critical acclaim at a series of independent film festivals throughout 2005, *Brokeback* cautiously entered U.S. theaters in a staggered release starting on December 9th in only three cities. By February 3, 2006 it had reached 2,089 theaters with unexpected success, grossing more than $83 million in North America alone, and $178 million total worldwide.

More than just a movie, however, *Brokeback Mountain* emerged as a popular talking point across mainstream American culture, from water coolers to *Saturday Night Live*. The movie went on to win four Golden Globes including "Best Motion Picture – Drama" and received eight Academy Award nominations, the most of any movie that year. Widespread jokes and parodies of the movie began appearing in early 2006 from late-night talk shows to Internet mash-ups, mock movie trailers using scenes from classic films like *Back to the Future* and *Star Wars* to depict their male leads in a series of emotional moments designed to reinterpret their actions as suppressed homosexual desire. The yearning theme from *Brokeback Mountain* plays over the whole trailer for emotional effect. The popularity of many such mash-ups even inspired a montage of classic cowboy films during the 78th Academy Awards complete with the score from *Brokeback* playing over lingering gazes and (homo)sexually-suggestive comments by the

characters. Such popular humor attests to the significant impact *Brokeback Mountain* has had on the cultural landscape.

Brokeback Mountain was a major site of discussion in late 2005 and early 2006, invading popular media in print, television, and on the Internet. Although less overtly contentious, the corpus of discourse rivals that of Mel Gibson's controversial 2004 movie *The Passion of the Christ*, which was no small feat. Discussion topics ranged from a dedicated interest in the actors and their personal lives, to speculation over the movie's ability to reach Middle America, to discussion of "Brokeback marriages," real-life stories of gay men who stayed in heterosexual relationships for a significant portion of their lives. The wealth of rhetoric on a single topic relating to depictions of gay men makes it an ideal locus of attention for a comparative analysis such as this.

As Brandon Gray of Box Office Mojo said, "The awards, the press, have made it [*Brokeback Mountain*] as much an event as a movie" (C. James, 2006). Indeed it was, for the material content of the film is not what is most interesting about *Brokeback Mountain*. Rather, I seek to understand the film in the sense of Michel Foucault's term eventalization, to "analyze an event according to multiple processes which constitute it" (1991, p. 76). In the following chapters, I look at how various rhetorical strategies constituted very different understandings of *Brokeback Mountain*.

Materially, the film did not change between December and March, yet *discursively* it transformed from a universal love story to a gay message movie (See chapter 2). The spectacle of *Brokeback Mountain* existed, it appears, within the discourse surrounding it in society. It is not at this point a movie in any traditional sense; it is a schism of reality and perception steeped with representations in both. It represented gay

male sexuality and sexual oppression because people talked about it as doing so. *Brokeback Mountain* was not simply a means to achieve entertainment or even cultural commentary as movies are conventionally seen. Yet it was cultural commentary inasmuch as it existed in the vicissitudes of public discourse. It is this existence which calls for closer attention to not just *Brokeback Mountain* the 134 minute film (indeed many people who talked about it had not actually seen the film), but rather to the multiple *Brokeback Mountain*s that existed in the public sphere and were made to do the ideological work of those who asserted them.

Publics and Cultures: Framing a Political Rhetoric

Political rhetoric cannot exist in a vacuum, and it will always be contingent on the specific contexts and structures within which it functions. So in line with a discursive understanding of *Brokeback Mountain* as an event, I must employ a broad understanding of political rhetoric. This understanding is outlined below as the convergence of culture, politics, and people which forms specific opportunities that a rhetor must understand and exploit in order to be effective. To explain that position I must locate myself in debates about the "public sphere." Specifically, I outline a circulation theory of publics and counterpublics as a useful framework for comprehending minority political rhetoric.

To better understand the rhetorical situation within which assimilationist and integrationist approaches circulate, I utilize Michael Warner's (2002) conception of publics and counterpublics. Warner's ideas are an extension of Habermasian theory on the public sphere which takes into account several of its criticisms. I presume a general familiarity with Habermas's original theory of the public sphere, but let me offer a brief

overview of significant themes for this project. In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1991), Habermas conceptualizes the public sphere as the ideal site of political interaction. The primary apparatuses of this interaction are assembly and dialogue where an open, accessible, egalitarian discussion considers topics of "general interest." Basically, it is conceived of as many "private people gathered together as a public and articulating the needs of society with the state" (p. 176). In that sense, the public sphere is in opposition to the state, not the private, although it still retains an internal public-private distinction. The modes of discourse are considered rational-critical and seek to apply enlightenment models of reasoning toward deliberative ends.

Even though this model is still very present on the heuristic level, many scholars such as Nancy Fraser have critiqued it as overly idealized and elitist for not taking into account the publicness of "private" life, especially when it came to identifying the place of women in the public sphere. Taking many of those critiques into account, Warner recognizes that groups form different publics which interact from specific locations, not a universal center of debate. Nor are his publics premised on a foundation of "private" life; rather, Warner's publics are both multiple and abstract. Based not on an essential identity, a public "exists by virtue of being addressed" (2002, p. 67). In other words, publics are called into being by discourse, which means that special care must be attended to rhetoric when discussing a public. Beyond that, Warner emphasizes circulation and citation as the model of success; "A text, to have a public, must continue to circulate through time" (p. 97). The circulation model of the public sphere is a significant departure from Habermas's static binary of public/private.

Besides reconceptualizing publics, Warner also examines counterpublics as a specific type of public. Rather than being defined against the state, counterpublics are at odds with other publics and mainstream society. Warner makes the distinction clearly by comparing counterpublics to the more traditional Habermasian public sphere:

> The [Habermasian] bourgeois public sphere consists of private persons whose identity is formed in the privacy of the conjugal domestic family and who enter the rational-critical debate around matters common to all by bracketing their embodiment and status [in other words: by identifying with a public]. Counterpublics of sexuality and gender, on the other hand, are scenes of association and identity that transform the private lives they mediate. (p. 57)

Counterpublics are co-constitutive of the lives and people associated with them: They mark people with identities (be they black, gay, poor, etc.) but those identities are constructed by how the various members perform such identity. The relation between the counterpublic and other publics is also a transformative one since no public lives in isolation. Rather, they elaborate the world together in a de facto collaboration of interests. For Warner, publics and counterpublics do more than entertain dialogue about political matters: they also "work to elaborate new worlds of culture and social relation in which gender and sexuality can be lived, including forms of intimate association, vocabularies of affect, styles of embodiment, erotic practices, and relations of care and pedagogy" (p. 57). This transformative effect is heightened in counterpublics whose very existence is highlighted for its lived differences to mainstream publics.

How is publicness constructed under this model? As Warner states, "One doesn't 'go public' simply as an act of will—neither by writing, nor by having an opinion, nor by

exposing oneself in the marketplace. The context of publicness must be made available, allowing these actions to count in a public way, to be transformative" (2002, p. 63). The political quality of such actions is premised on a citationality which is central to the model of circulation; what is political is rooted in what *was* political, in affirmative endorsement (even if only implicit) or some form of dissent. So if publics are not self-driven as Habermas conceived, the context of publicness must be constituted elsewhere.

In our image-saturated contemporary society, media is often what calls publics into existence. DeLuca and Peeples (2002) have insisted that the public screen (as in the television screen) must become a necessary part of our understanding of contemporary public practices. They describe the shift to managing *publicity* within this public screen as the dominant mode of public discourse. This shift grows out of media theory through suggesting that "new technologies introduce new forms of social organization and new forms of perception" (p. 131). In a co-constitutive rhetorical situation, the form of interaction influences our reality and the available field of citation. This conception of publicness is particularly relevant for this study as queer activists have been manipulating the public screen for decades (i.e. Zaps in the Gay Activist Alliance and ACT UP). But what is especially interesting is how even that form of activism seems to have largely faded in the LGBT movement. I am not ready to flatly decry its loss as Warner does, but it nonetheless does leave open a rhetorical gap that warrants further explanation. *Brokeback Mountain* in particular seems to border DeLuca and Peeple's conception of public screen and a more traditional public sphere rooted in "embodied gatherings of culturally homogenous, equal citizens engaged in rational dialogue" (p. 134). It is certainly an image event with a calculated political message (or at least profit motive),

but it also spurred the more traditional venues of discussion, albeit in new ways such as blogs and more mediated forms of circulation.

Indeed, the technological landscape of the public sphere has changed significantly since even the time of Habermas's original work. The public screen calls attention to the way traditional public sphere theory privileges embodied voices and dialogue as the ideal for interaction: the authors note the limits of such possibilities given the structure of modern media. Instead it serves to acknowledge—after Peters (1999)—the fundamentally disseminatory (as opposed to dialogic) nature of social communication. But in a circulation model of publics, even dissemination must enact some form of citationality on the level of discourse. So while not dialogue in the traditional sense, nor is the rhetorical situation reducible to sovereign actors instigating wholly originary words. Understanding these principles for the present study means asking questions such as: What are the limits and possibilities of certain forms of representation in media? What are the possible political orientations for achieving specific political ends in media? How is the livability[3] of certain LGBT lives affected by different rhetorical approaches to politics? My analysis sheds light on these questions and their significance in finding more effective solutions to LGBT public advocacy.

Nancy Fraser offers another critique of Habermas's ideal of the public sphere. In particular, Fraser (1990) was one of the first to outline the implications of an understanding of the public sphere as multiple publics. As Fraser describes it, Habermas's public sphere "supposes that social equality is not a necessary condition for participatory parity in public spheres" (p. 65). In other words, the idea that identities can

[3] In *Undoing Gender* (2004a), Judith Butler has forwarded the "livable life" as the ethical standard for political and cultural practices and I take that as my criterion for LGBT movement rhetoric as well.

(and must) be bracketed and remain private ignores the structural ways that exclusions may still occur. Fraser goes on to argue that the singular conception of the public sphere only serves to exacerbate such exclusions. Instead, she proposes that "a plurality of competing publics better promote the ideal of participatory parity" (p. 66). In other words, in a pluralistic society the interaction of multiple publics best serve the interests of society as a whole.

Beyond facilitating better models of participation among multiple groups, Fraser notes that "they are also arenas for the formation and enactment of social identities" (p. 68). This is important, as a central concern of my project deals with identity and subjectivity as the link between publics and rhetoric. As Fraser describes it, identity is formed through public interaction. She writes, "Preferences, interests, and identities are as much outcomes as antecedents of public deliberation" (p. 72). While identifying this moment of subjectification as important, Fraser did not yet offer insight about how it functions. At the time it remained largely untheorized, but was soon taken up notably by Butler in *Gender Trouble* (1999), where she described performativity and citationality as central processes of identity construction.

When looking at the rhetorical aspects of identity, the circulation of discourse becomes a central concern of public sphere theory. Kendal Phillips has argued that consensus is prefigured as the ideal telos of the traditional public sphere. However, in a sphere of multiple interacting publics, Phillips believes consensus silences rather than enables the diverse and open realm of discussion for which it sets out to be. Drawing on Lyotard and Foucault, Phillips reminds us that "dissention and diversity are valuable ends of discussion" (1996, p. 244). In fact, he goes on to picture dissent in service of

consensus, “Dissent is not merely an obstacle, heuristic, or corrective to consensus but, rather, the site of struggle between, and transformation of, multiple consensual communities” (p. 243). In other words, Habermas’s single unified public ignores the value of the multiplicity of perspectives that must interact for true public debate. By bracketing identity and conceptualizing it as pre-formed in “private,” a single public sphere produces dissent as mutually exclusive with participation. Instead, Phillips envisions “dissension as that area of ambiguity and contestation lying at the edges of and between individual consensual communities” (p. 244). Dissent is the very thing communities share, the commonality that brings them together in a public sphere.

The conception of the public sphere as made up of circulating discourse and multiple interacting publics is widely embraced by communication researchers. In particular, Asen (2002), Finnegan & Jiyeon (2004), Gaonkar (2002), Greene (2002), Sloop & Ono (1997), and Phillips (1996) all utilize some form of this model. To summarize the relevance of the public and counterpublic frame to the present study, assimilationist rhetoric seeks to address the relationship between LGBT people and a state-mediated public sphere; integrationist rhetoric looks to the relationship between the mainstream public(s) and the LGBT counterpublic(s). In other words, I show how an assimilationist rhetoric understands itself as existing on the margins of a singular public sphere and integrationist rhetoric recognizes itself as circulating in a multiplicity of specific counterpublics.

As my case studies demonstrate, I chose to focus on cultural artifacts as the primary site of these political struggles. As Elisabeth Bronfen (2006) notes, postmodern culture is deeply immersed in simulacra. For her the connection between politics and

culture is “a circuit of perpetuated information [that] emerges in which utterances made by politicians or their spokespeople gain affective and imaginary power in such a way that a political reality is initially produced only to be managed by another cultural network, namely that of the media” (p. 22). In other words, print media and the blogosphere, for example, take on the task of managing our social reality. For Bronfen, “it is precisely within the cultural imaginary that real political battles are fought” (p. 23). The examples I discuss in this project demonstrate those battles—battles between assimilationist and integrationist rhetoric and the respective worlds they seek to engender.

This thesis is focused around two case studies, both centered on different aspects of discourse surrounding the movie *Brokeback Mountain*. In the next chapter, I look at assimilationist rhetoric as it was implemented in mainstream print media. I follow what on first glance appear to be contradictions by the same people calling it at first a universal love story and later a gay message movie. Ultimately, I argue that the different labels occur based on strategic rhetorical choices within a singular conception of the public sphere. At first the movie was seen as existing on the margin, so universalizing rhetoric attempted to appeal to mainstream audiences. Later, once those audiences were seen as accepting the movie, the strategy changed and those who disliked the movie were strategically identified as outside the mainstream. In the third chapter, I move to blog discourse on *Brokeback* as a place to find integrationist rhetoric. The interconnected nature of blogs as a medium encourage circulation to a much higher degree than other media. This helps foster more counterpublic strategies, such as integrationist rhetoric, which understands itself as working in a sphere of multiple interacting publics. I argue that integrationist rhetoric forefronts gay experience, is expressly critical of mainstream

and assimilationist rhetoric, enacts queer world-making, and attends to process over telos. While these two rhetorical strategies are already in use and have been addressed on different levels by some scholars, I feel the conflict between them has been less than fully articulated. I hope to contribute to that project by outlining their respective strategic value for making LGBT lives more livable.

CHAPTER TWO

ASSIMILATING *BROKEBACK MOUNTAIN*: STRATEGIC CONTRADICTION FROM THE MARGINS

As I outlined in the previous chapter, there are two distinct (if related and overlapping) strands of LGBT political rhetoric present in discourse about the movie *Brokeback Mountain*. In this chapter I lay out the first, assimilationist rhetoric, in more detail. I recognize that I cannot describe all of the discourse around *Brokeback Mountain*; such a totalizing claim would not only be incredulous, but also less interesting. Rather, in this chapter I employ a critical eye informed by Celeste Condit's empathic criticism (1993); I set out to analyze one particularly popular thread of rhetoric and identify its limits and possibilities as a political rhetorical strategy for LGBT rights.

Before I analyze what was said in the texts, let me begin by describing who used primarily assimilationist rhetorical strategies. With few exceptions, writers and reviewers in the mainstream print media deployed largely this approach in discussing the film (particularly those who were ostensibly supportive of LGBT political rights). Likewise, the public rhetoric of the filmmakers and actors was a prime source for this, both in interviews as well as commentary on the film's DVD. The final groups I shall highlight in this chapter are the major national LGBT organizations, including the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) and The Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD). It is important to remember that both LGBT people and heterosexuals could equally deploy assimilationist rhetoric, so the sexuality of the writers in this section is irrelevant to our

present concerns. As I will argue based on their public discourse, these groups believed that assimilationist rhetoric was the best vehicle for their largely similar political goals.

But looking at the public texts of these groups from early and late discussions of *Brokeback Mountain*, one might be unwilling to believe they deployed a consistent rhetorical strategy because of the apparent inconsistencies that developed over the course of the movie's run. Specifically, one is drawn to ask: How does *Brokeback Mountain* go from being lauded as the movie about universal love to being seen as a gay message movie denied by so-called homophobic Academy Awards voters? Such were the vicissitudes of the discursive field of sexual politics. However, despite appearances, these were not contradictory positions. As I show, the later claims of political importance resulted directly *from* the political field constituted by the early assimilationist discourse that largely denied any politics. It is the purpose of this chapter to trace that line of transformation and by way of textual analysis offer an explanation as to why it occurred. Specifically, I argue that the mainstream discourse on *Brokeback Mountain* by the previously identified constituents tended to forward a precisely assimilationist understanding of politics. As outlined in the first chapter, this politics was based on liberal identity and the ideal of a singular public sphere in opposition to the state.

Such a political rhetoric struggled with a few key questions that played out at specific moments over the movie's run. First: What does the political/public sphere look like? And similarly, What counts as politics? Or, more specifically for this context, What counts as an agenda or message movie? An assimilationist understanding of politics came with it a specific understanding of what political discourse looked like and how it should be described. I outline that understanding below. Similarly relevant for the present study,

many writers asked, “What counts as success for this movie?” To answer this question, we must look within the field of politics described by the first question. Once there, we can ask supplementary questions of these texts: What counts as universal? What counts as mainstream? And, What place does culture have in political practice? In other words, the discourse around this movie was constitutive of the both the “mainstream” and even what counted as political. These are the questions that drive the analysis in this chapter. Their answers will demonstrate over the course of the analysis how supporters of assimilationist rhetoric deployed the political in their public discourse. I trace the contours of that discourse in order to better understand this type of politics as well as its limits and possibilities.

The Early *Mountain*: Universalizing as Political Tactic

The Assimilationist Public Sphere

The first question that must drive my analysis of assimilationist rhetoric is: What counts as politics? To answer that we must understand what model of public sphere discourse is at work. For assimilationist rhetors, the public sphere is a singular encasement with a center and margins. Such a conception of public interaction evokes the idea of the bourgeois public sphere first described by Habermas. While there are other models of publics available, this unitary conception is still particularly prominent, including for assimilationist rhetoric. Where there is only one public, finding a political voice becomes a matter of inclusion and exclusion. Those at the margins of society are not allowed to engage in the public discourse located at its center. For those whose political goal is the inclusion of the marginalized, boundaries must shift.

The category of universal becomes especially important in this public sphere. As a practical strategy, what is to be effective politically must be posited as universal. If something can be said to be universal, it ontologically connects those at the margin and center since they are seen to share some commonality. However, if something is seen only as different and specific ("other") it can be safely relegated to the margins. This powerful distinction makes the universal a very political category.

The early writers on *Brokeback Mountain* identified their politics most clearly (albeit indirectly) in how they established criteria for success. From the earliest reviews of *Brokeback* that came out in the days leading up to its release, one of most prominent concerns of writers in popular media concerned whether the movie would be successful with mainstream audiences. In fact, a typical review of the film was largely structured around answering this question. *USA Today* asked, "Can a film about homosexual cowboys have success across America?" (Puig, 2005). The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* printed an article titled "Gay love story has mountain it must climb: Mass appeal" in which the author asks, "Can the movie play in smaller cities in the so-called red states?" (Murray, 2005). Even more overtly, the *Los Angeles Times* posted a headline on page one: "Can '*Brokeback Mountain*' move the heartland?" (Welkos & Dutka, 2005). Even early writers already confident of *Brokeback*'s success remained centrally concerned with its mainstream appeal. An article in the *Chicago Sun-Times* compared a sneak-peek showing of *Brokeback* to the negative reaction audiences gave the gay kiss in 1982's *Making Love*. A quote from GLAAD entertainment media director Damon Romine seems to summarize the author's position:

> In a very mixed audience I was part of, it got a standing ovation at the end. It's an American love story, and a tragedy as well, that transcends gay or straight. It's the age-old theme of forbidden love, and who can't relate to that? (Nance, 2005)

Whether skeptical or immediately convinced, the questions on popular press reporters' minds involved discussing the movie's ability to connect with mainstream/Midwest/Middle American/heartland/red state audiences. This was a common theme that carried throughout the movie's run. From the early reviews through its limited release in December, almost every article asked centrally: Will it appeal to audiences outside the big cities? Once it reached a wider release, as I describe below, that original question was answered, but the central concern for what the movie meant for mainstream audiences remained in new forms.

What such questions imply is a certain notion of both the political sphere itself and what counts as success/achievement within it. These questions take for granted an assumption of a public sphere where the majority of the population resides in a central, unitary public within which public opinion (and its political force) is established. By way of exclusion, LGBT people (and their stories) exist only at the margins of this sphere. Since representation per se means representation within public opinion, the goal of any progressive political movement must be to gain entry into that mainstream public. In a way renewing a vision of success in the singularity of public opinion posed by the ideal bourgeois public sphere detailed by Habermas, success means expanding the center to include the current margins. This is a linear/quantitative understanding of public sphere inclusion; by Habermasian standards, the more people included in the public sphere the better. Those not in the center are not in the public sphere, and thus have no power to

influence the state and its policies. Therefore, in this case of assimilationist rhetoric on *Brokeback,* success for LGBT political rights was located in becoming popular with mainstream audiences and subsequently included in their public sphere.

This vision of politics was perhaps clearest in the visual terminology describing the film as "groundbreaking" which evoked an image of pushing barriers and opening access to the mainstream. After posing the question of how broad an audience the movie will attract, one writer stated, "No one knows that answer, because no one has ventured into this territory before. This movie is a groundbreaker. There has never been a homosexual cowboy movie…. 'It's the one last frontier,' says [director Ang] Lee" (Thompson, 2005). Elsewhere it was called "Flawed but groundbreaking" (Gillespie, 2005) and "*Brokeback Mountain* is charting new frontiers" (Puig, 2005). In each case, the film was seen as entering a delineable cultural zone (westerns, cowboys, love) that was seen as firmly rooted at the center of the political sphere. If so, the movie was lauded for its potential to open a permanent path from the margins to achieve LGBT rights in the center.

Universal Love

With this unitary model of the public sphere and political deliberation as their frame, writers supportive of LGBT rights via assimilationist rhetoric in mainstream press sought to highlight the universal qualities of *Brokeback Mountain* as its ability to access this mainstream audience. The early pieces, mainly from mid- to late-December 2005, posed the question of whether or not it would resonate with mainstream audiences simultaneously with explanations of its universal themes to explain why it should. In

other words, they laid out the question as a means of arriving at their desired (political) conclusion: universality.

In one of the earliest articles about the movie, director Ang Lee was quoted saying, “It’s a great American love story” (Durbin, 2005). This became an oft-repeated slogan throughout the movie’s run. *Brokeback* was constituted here within a mainstream/universal (they are taken as synonymous within this discourse) genre understood as identifying with popular audiences. A *Star Tribune* article subtitle read, “The so-called ‘gay cowboy movie’ is really a classic romantic melodrama, flawlessly executed, that happens to feature two men” (Covert, 2005). Here the universal (classic romantic melodrama) was highlighted and the difference/gayness was made secondary or incidental. One article even connected that aspect of universal love directly to the question of mainstream appeal, “The film’s last half is indeed a powerful love story that no one with a heart should be unaffected by. The question is: How many people, straight men in particular, will make it through the first half?” (Harrison, 2005). Despite the ambivalence about *Brokeback*’s success present in many of these early articles, the insistence on universalism was clear. The ambivalence was less about their understanding of the show than their perception of the state of mainstream political opinion.

Other universalizing labels were applied to the film as well. One of the most widely cited was that of “forbidden love.” Basically a genre in itself, the forbidden love story label connected *Brokeback* with a history of movies dealing with a large variety of cultures. What makes this genre specifically universalizing is its focus on erasing difference between race, class, ethnicity, etc. in order that the protagonists might overcome the systemic obstacles that stand in the way of their being happy together.

Roger Ebert of the *Chicago Sun-Times* perhaps said it most clearly, “Their tragedy is universal. It could be about two women, or lovers from different religious or ethnic groups -- any ‘forbidden’ love”(Ebert, 2005). The specific gay subjectivities that lead to the tragedy in *Brokeback* were downplayed and made secondary at most. Instead they were put in the service of a universal theme of forbidden love which according to Ebert included any religious or ethnic differences.

Frank Rich, never one to mask his politics, perhaps said overtly what many others implied in this universalizing. Predicting that the answer to the LA Times headline “Can ‘*Brokeback Mountain’* move the heartland” would be “a resounding yes.” He went on to write,

> Ennis’s and Jack’s acute emotions—yearning, loneliness, disappointment, loss, love and, yes, lust—are affecting because they are universal…. Without a single polemical speech, this laconic film dramatizes homosexuality as an inherent identity, rather than some aberrant and elective “agenda” concocted by conspiratorial “elites” in Chelsea, the Castro and South Beach, as anti-gay proselytizers would have it. (Rich, 2005)

These personal and emotional qualities of the film (yearning, loneliness, etc.) were widely cited as generating this sense of universal appeal and identification. Even LGBT newspapers were common advocates of the universalizing read. For example, one *New York Blade* article applauded *Brokeback*’s universal achievement, “Instead of giving us a strictly ‘gay’ fable of forbidden love, Lee creates a tragedy whose scope is distinctly larger. It’s not so much a Western as an epic romance that happens to feature horses and sheep as set dressing” (Butler, 2005). This read of *Brokeback* as dealing in universals was

not only an easy read of the film as seen through an assimilationist rhetorical orientation, but it was also the officially-sanctioned read. Beyond consistent rhetorical universalizing in interviews (to the point of coherent talking points), the filmmakers are quite overt about it in the DVD bonus features.

Right in line with the media discourse addressed above, the DVD extra text is filled with statements that describe the film in universalizing ways. Director Ang Lee says, “I always like making dramas which is [sic] about conflict. You put different ingredients which is [sic] in conflict with each other through which you examine humanity.” Here he establishes *Brokeback* as part of a universal formula of moviemaking (one already proven to attract large mainstream audiences). He merely changes some variables in each feature in order to look at humanity in different contexts.

The “From Script to Screen” featurette is perhaps the most interesting segment for its sustained focus on the story itself. In particular, the first few minutes show a series of auteurs and actors describing how they understand the film. For example, Anne Hathaway says that, “I always did recognize it as being the love story that it is. [As] it just being heartbreaking and very very real.” Hathaway’s statement further supports the read of *Brokeback* as a universal love story. Continuing on, the featurette moves to Ledger. “For me it’s a story about how love transcends all,” he says. Universal love continues to play the central role and any gay-specificity is played down. Gyllenhaal echoes a similar sentiment stating that

> I was immediately drawn to the idea that love stories were not told in this way and it felt like the struggles and the trials that it takes to actually be in love and to keep it going are—that’s what it’s about.

Not only does this statement continue to define *Brokeback* as a love story but it reinforces the idea forwarded by Lee above that the specific struggles are merely ingredients in the (larger/universal) understanding of human emotion.

Importantly, auteurs describing the film in this segment are not afraid to explicate specific identities other than gayness. Screenwriter Diana Ossana explains *Brokeback*'s rural nature:

> It is a story that's rural. It's about rural country people. It is about people from small towns. These are two young men that are very poor. They're not particularly educated, they don't have a lot of prospects, they're certainly not upper class people, they're main drive in life is survival. They wanna make enough money to buy a second shirt or get a new hat or feed themselves, maybe get their truck fixed, you know, their needs are very very very basic.

I quote her at length to demonstrate the specificity and detail to which she acknowledges in this regard. She clearly identifies qualities of the lives of rural people that she believes are central to the characters. She delineates them in poignant detail and offers them here as insight into the characters and the nature of the story. She feels it is important to understand what it means to be specifically rural and poor. Yet at no point on the DVD is such an insight offered for what it means to be specifically gay. Since the specific frame of assimilationist rhetoric relies on its universal appeal, it *cannot* consider those thoughts. At most they are seen as unproductive toward attaining the inclusion into the mainstream/public sphere at the heart of supporters' political goals.

Perhaps more important than descriptions by auteurs of what the movie *is* (universal) are statements as to what it *is not* ("gay cowboy movie"). Conspicuous in its

absence is the very word *gay*. Within the first three segments (of four; and the only segments designed by the auteurs for the DVD[4]) it only appears once: Jake Gyllenhaal says about Director Ang Lee, "it [*Brokeback*] needed to find that person who was gonna make it into the—kinda like take it to a metaphysical level rather than just play it on just this is a story about two gay cowboys, it had to be about really about love, ya know?" Here Gyllenhaal hierarchicalizes the aspects of the movie's meaning; gayness is merely secondary to the transcendent love. The final line says it all, "it had to be about really about love." This view of the movie moves *Brokeback Mountain* from "gay cowboy movie" to "universal love story." The only other instance of a gay identifier is a brief clip from the movie in this same segment: "You know I ain't queer," says Leger's character Ennis. "Me neither," agrees Gyllenhaal as Jack. In both Gyllenhaal's statement and this brief clip, gay/queer appears only in order to be denied. Gayness is only brought up in order to knock it back down.

The Logo movie special included on the DVD closes with a string of various auteurs and actors furthering this effect by denouncing the popular "gay cowboy movie" label outright. Michelle Williams says, "We come up with terms like 'gay cowboy movie' because it's easier to swallow than what the movie is really about," referring again to the same universal love. Heath Ledger states that "We've always known what the movie is and it definitely transcends that title [gay cowboy movie]." Here we have more downplaying of the movie's gayness. Even in this Logo special originally created for an explicitly LGBT audience, the universalizing theme is just as primary as elsewhere in the DVD extra text. To close out the segment, Ang Lee states that "people after seeing the movie stop calling it 'gay cowboy movie'; they call it 'love story.'" The preferred

[4] The fourth is a special on the film produced and aired by gay cable network Logo on December 5, 2005.

read of *Brokeback*'s autuers is firmly established in this DVD and it leaves no room for an interpretation that politicizes the film by highlighting queerness/difference. Rather, it is firmly rooted in the assimilationist rhetorical tradition where to be effectively political is to be universal.

When is a Message Not a Message?

I have just described how universalizing rhetoric was used to forward the assimilationist political goals within its understanding of politics as having a centralized sphere of public opinion. A similar way *Brokeback Mountain* was politicized in early articles was by overt, often tenacious denials that it was a "message movie." These discussions contained the locus of two questions I posed earlier: What counts as politics? and What counts as mainstream? A message movie, in the sense evoked by these discussions, was understood both as political (espousing an ideology and agenda) and also located outside the mainstream. Basically, many early articles denied *Brokeback*'s status as a message movie in order to strengthen its status as universal (implying that it could not be both). A *Los Angeles Times* editorial stated the matter plainly:

> Arriving at the climax of a cultural moment that includes "*Will & Grace*," Mary Cheney and above all Ellen (no last name needed), "*Brokeback*" is a shrewdly crafted "prestige" picture aimed like a heat-seeking missile at the same female viewers who made "*Queer as Folk*" a cable hit. The movie is not daring, or edgy, or even particularly controversial. It's not about "gay liberation" or the radical politics that would transform self and society. What it is is a well-closeted romance, replete with studly leads smooching and muttering about "feelings" in

> ways sure to set aflutter those feminine hearts longing for a soft-core version of hot man-to-man action. (Ehrenstein, 2006)

This claim to (at least female) universal appeal was said to deny political implications. The comparison with *Queer as Folk* is particularly insightful of this position. *Queer as Folk* (like it or hate it) has been clearly marked by mainstream press as a controversial, political statement of a show and has been successful with its (initially unexpected) core audience of heterosexual women. The author here, however, conflated appealing to women as universalizing and depoliticizing. Importantly, no room is left for an interpretation of the movie that may appeal to heterosexual audiences and retain the distinct message about specifically gay lives or any related political content. This brings us back to the understanding of politics implicit in assimilationist rhetoric; one central public sphere and one unitary public opinion. One cannot be both located in the center and espouse a politics from the margin, or vice versa.

Another article made a similar claim that encompassed much of the universalizing discussed in this section:

> At its core "*Brokeback*" isn't radical at all. It's about the ache, the obsessive push and pull, of forbidden love. However morally objectionable some in the straight world might want to paint it, this film gets straight to the marrow: Love is the fuel of all humanity. Straight or gay, we all want to get it and to give it in return. (Mullen, 2006)

Here love was identified as the central guiding theme to *Brokeback Mountain*. This was the ultimate universalizing theme as it expanded even beyond the specificity of "forbidden" love and attempted to reach every single human relationship. And at its base,

this claim was founded on a denial of anything “radical” (read: political agenda) in the movie.

Making connections to other popular love stories was another approach, one article tied *Brokeback* to the most universal movie ever made (if box office receipts are the guide), *Titanic*.

> Some conservatives, without seeing “*Brokeback Mountain*,” have dismissed it as homosexual propaganda. But despite its provocative subject, the film has no overt political agenda. And many who’ve seen it agree that in some respects, it's not even a gay movie. As a sweeping, tragic love story, “*Brokeback Mountain*” has more in common with “*Titanic*,” the most popular movie ever, than an art film steeped in the urban gay lifestyle. (Griggs, 2006)

Here again, the political agenda was denied and the universal was extolled. The qualification that detractors (conservatives arguing that *Brokeback* was “homosexual propaganda”) had yet to see the movie was a common device used to dismiss their claims, locate them as outside the mainstream, and further reify the universal nature of *Brokeback*’s appeal. For if it truly was universal, as these authors claimed, anyone who saw it must connect with it. If a detractor had seen the movie and still disdained it, their claims to universality would unravel.

The *Mountain* Grows: Redefining Success at the Cultural Shift

In the previous section I described how advocates of assimilationist rhetoric envisioned the political field as one of a singular public sphere. The shape of this political field was not a static one, despite its conception of a unitary public sphere. Indeed

precisely because of the linear vision of inclusion, a movement occurred where the margins became incorporated into the mainstream. As I show in this section, once it became clear that *Brokeback* would be successful with mainstream audiences, it was described as a sign of the times, a cultural shift where gay became mainstream—included in *the* public sphere. This was the step necessary for *Brokeback* later to be seen as a message movie despite early rhetoric to the contrary; I map that transformation below.

As stated above, the Midwest audiences had been widely identified as the test of success for this movie. Yet by January, when the movie slowly crept into wider release, the mainstream press seemed suddenly confused as how to read the ballots. Many trumpeted its success (the narrative that eventually won out), but others read the early sales as a defeat.

Citing *Slate* columnist Mickey Kaus and Frank Rich (quoted above), the *Boston Globe* touted *Brokeback* a mainstream failure, "It looks like Mickey Kaus was right and Frank Rich was wrong. After opening strongly in New York and Los Angeles a month ago, "*Brokeback Mountain*" is now the 13th most popular movie in the country, according to *Variety*. It's no failure, but it's not headed for resounding success either" (Beam, 2006). It failed, but why? According to this author, because it was a "heavy-handed morality play." He went on to flatly deny critical praise of the movie as universal. Rather he quoted Kaus, "If heterosexual men in the heartland don't flock to see *Brokeback Mountain*' it's not because they're bigoted. It's because they're heterosexual" (Beam, 2006). In other words, he did not accept the assimilationist rhetorical frame of universalism and retained a view of *Brokeback* as specifically rooted in the gay experience.

Less than a week later, however, *USA Today* continued the universalizing narrative tout court: “Don’t look now, but *Brokeback Mountain* is selling in the heartland” (Bowles, 2006a). The main difference between the articles was in how they read the numbers. The *Globe* article looked at total sales, while most sources privileged the per-screen average (which was higher for *Brokeback* than the number one movie of the same period due to its still limited release).

By the end of January, the *San Francisco Chronicle* trumpeted *Brokeback*’s success in even bolder terms, “Not only was a movie about gay romance selling out in the heart of suburbia, the audience appeared to be older, straighter and more conservative than anyone would have expected” (Nevius, 2006). The article went on to mark it as “one of those cultural landmarks like ‘*The Graduate*’ or ‘*Pulp Fiction*,’ movies that everyone uses as a reference to a specific time period” (Nevius, 2006). Beyond a movie, here *Brokeback* gained broader social implications. Politics, culture, and media were beginning to converge in the discourse of assimilationist rhetoric around *Brokeback Mountain*.

Similarly, other articles saw *Brokeback*’s success as a sign of a cultural shift. “This might be the right movie at the right time” (Puig, 2005). Elsewhere, “The early success of ‘*Brokeback Mountain*’ also signals a seismic cultural shift in the American moviegoing public’s attitudes toward homosexuality—specifically toward gay men who aren’t drag queens or there for comic relief—in the past quarter-century” (Nance, 2005). These claims were important for the assimilationist political field. If *Brokeback* could be seen as a success, that meant (by the terms set out in the earlier sections) that mainstream audiences were connecting with the movie. The implication for these authors, then, was

that the audiences were embracing LGBT politics too. In other words, the movie could now be seen as both universal *and* political once its politics had become mainstream politics. If viewership could be seen as inclusion, then *Brokeback* signaled an advance in gay politics. This was the understanding forwarded by writers implementing assimilationist rhetoric.

After it became clear that the movie would continue to sell relatively well in Middle America, the same language sustained, “No one can argue that what many predicted would be a niche movie has jumped its demographic to become a red state-blue state phenomenon” ("In the Best Film Race, the Question Is Not Who but Why", 2006). Once the movie entered mainstream cultural territory, it gained access to political territory as well. *Brokeback* had officially entered the mainstream public sphere.

The Academy Awards Horse Race

Come February, attention shifted to the Academy Awards (and *Brokeback*’s top eight nominations). Quickly, many in the mainstream press took up the success narrative detailed in the previous section to posit *Brokeback Mountain* as the front runner. As I show below, this corresponded to a common horse race political terminology that helped highlight the movie’s politics. Similarly, writers employing assimilationist rhetoric used the Academy Awards buildup to further highlight the zeitgeist quality of contemporary culture wars around sexuality.

One *USA Today* article summarized the situation, “It has yet to win an Academy Award. It has never been the No. 1 film in theaters. Not that many people have seen it. Yet *Brokeback Mountain* already is The Movie. The film is the punch line of jokes, the

subject of Internet parodies and the front-runner for the Oscars" (Bowles, 2006b). By this point *Brokeback* had been the subject of a massive cultural invasion from late night comedy routines to internet mashups. The nominations themselves were even seen as further evidence to its universal qualities:

> The eight nominations for "*Brokeback Mountain*" are vindication for a story many in Hollywood were not eager to finance…. Some cynics predicted a quick box-office fade because of the movie's subject matter, but "*Brokeback*" opened strong and has won broad support from general audiences. (Ebert, 2006)

Here, vindication meant confirmation that this movie had indeed entered the mainstream. The cultural invasion was read as a result of the film's universal appeal resonating with broad audiences. Later, Brandon Gray of Box Office Mojo was quoted saying, "The thing *Brokeback* has that the other movies don't is a 'must-see' quality to it. The awards, the press, have made it as much an event as a movie" (Bowles, 2006c). Again, the broad cultural impact was seen as making this more than a movie.

This was the way the movie moved into its final stage: seen as a message movie in full force. It was a message doomed to failure, however, at least by the standards set out earlier in the quest to establish its universality. *Brokeback*'s understanding as a message movie was closely linked with the increased attention to the Academy Awards and the corollary collection of political language deployed in that discourse. Such terminology seemed lifted straight from the 2004 Democratic Party primary. Several articles started asking whether *Brokeback* had "peaked too soon," echoing similar discussions of Howard Dean's and John Edwards' presidential campaigns. An article from the *Los Angeles Times*' online awards site was an early example:

> *Brokeback Mountain* has the air of inevitably, given the raft of hype from critics and industry observers. However, Ang Lee's cowboy love story could peak too soon — some may find that the emperor has no clothes, as is often the case with front-runners — and it will be a challenge for distributor Focus Features to find a mainstream audience. (Gray, 2005)

Connecting both the concern for a mainstream appeal and the horse race political terminology, this article was typical in its implicit analogizing of award shows to political campaigns.

Once mainstream audiences accepted it, it became politically useful to identify *Brokeback* as a message movie. Since the message of *Brokeback* was no longer understood as a marginal one but a normative one (already located in the center), the message could be more effectively conveyed to mainstream audiences. However, that change forced authors to go back and figure out where its message lay (since they had flatly denied it in earlier discourses). Some articles started to reconsider its status as a message movie by gaining an understanding that visuals could be political. After its Oscar nominations,

> The question remains: Does *Brokeback Mountain* have an agenda? After all, it's certainly not preachy…. But again, a movie is a collection of images, not just words…. They carry ideas. They issue proclamations. They lobby for policy…. It makes an argument with images craftily employed to communicate ideas. (Hunter, 2006)

This writer made an argument, in a sense, for the world-making quality of visual rhetoric. He advocated an understanding of the film which located its message not in verbal

proclamations, which it clearly lacks, but rather in images. The images of the film impart a particular understanding of gay men and their needs and desires. At this point, more authors were stating to acknowledge *Brokeback* as a message movie, certainly influenced by other message movies in the running for the Academy Awards. However, the final word on the matter only happened after the awards were handed out, and to the surprise of many: *Brokeback* lost.

Academy Awards Aftermath

Indeed once the Academy Awards came around, *Brokeback*'s status as a message movie became clear for those employing assimilationist rhetoric, especially when seen in comparison to the relatively high number of films dealing with sexuality and race prominent in the nominations. Utilizing the political language that came on even more extensively closer to the Academy Awards, one typical article described the situation,

> The buzz is so strong for "*Brokeback Mountain*," a Best Picture win on Sunday is not merely predictable but has the makings of a Hollywood social statement. It doesn't happen often - you have to look back in Oscar history to Steven Spielberg's "*Schindler's List*" in 1993 or Oliver Stone's "*Platoon*" in 1986 - but the support for "*Brokeback Mountain*" feels like *more than acknowledgment of a fine film. It feels like a cause.* (Means, 2006a, emphasis mine)

Despite the fact that early assimilationist discourse denied any cause being associated with the film, columnists began treating it as if it did. Once the cultural shift described above became the accepted narrative, *Brokeback*'s mainstream success allowed it to represent the LGBT social movement itself. Some writers remained skeptical that this

would lead to a win, however, and went as far as to predict a loss based on disapproval of the cause for LGBT rights,

> "*Crash*" will win Best Picture, the argument goes, because conservative Academy voters are uncomfortable with honoring a gay-themed movie, but they don't want to appear bigoted so they'll go for the black/white/Latino/Arab drama instead… Those arguments, though, feel like half-hearted attempts to inject some drama into an otherwise predictable Oscar Night. (Means, 2006b)[5]

Yet drama did ensue and three days later the same author decried just that eventuality:

> On an Oscar Night in which the nominees and a few of the speeches got political, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences backed away from making a true political statement. Faced with the chance to make history - and possibly incur the wrath of right-wing moralists - by honoring the gay-cowboy romance "*Brokeback Mountain*," Oscar voters instead gave the Best Picture award to "*Crash*," a collection of interlocking stories about strained race relations in Los Angeles. (Means, 2006a)

Largely dismissive of *Crash*, this author identified the Academy as bowing to the influence of "right-wing moralists" (clearly outside the mainstream). This writer was far less harsh than many. Most notably, *Brokeback* author Annie Proulx returned to voice her frustration in an article printed by *The Guardian*.

> We should have known conservative heffalump academy voters… living cloistered lives behind wrought-iron gates or in deluxe rest-homes, out of touch not only with the shifting larger culture and the yeasty ferment that is America

[5] *Crash* actually deals with Iranian Persians, not Arabs. In fact, one overt message of the movie is a critique of the conflation of those terms which this author does.

> these days… decide which films are good. And rumour has it that Lions Gate inundated the academy voters with DVD copies of Trash - excuse me - *Crash* a few weeks before the ballot deadline. (Proulx, 2006)

As these writers demonstrate, in order to explain the loss without rewriting the universalizing narrative, the Academy voters had to be identified as conservative (read: not in the mainstream). Here established as a referendum on gay rights, *Brokeback Mountain* became a martyr for the cause. This aroused outcries that near-demonized Academy voters and denounced *Crash* as one of the worst movies ever awarded Best Picture. Several authors went so far as to actually create such lists, on which *Crash* typically placed highly.

The reason so many writers were upset after the loss at the Academy Awards was because the field of success they originally established could not be reached. Their level of success was for *Brokeback* to be understood as fully universal and the linear/unitary model of the public sphere required top numbers in ticket sales and top award wins in order to be seen as successful. It could not settle for less. The Academy Awards were seen, in all the democratic-political terminology used annually to describe its process, as a representation of public opinion. Unfortunately, there would always be detractors.

Conclusions

After seeing the forms of the assimilationist discourse on *Brokeback Mountain*, we are in a position to enumerate some key limits and possibilities for it as a rhetorical strategy for the LGBT political movement. One of the most important limitations of the assimilationist rhetorical strategy is the distribution of exception resulting from any use

of “universal” in a humanistic tradition. The limit of what counts as universal must end somewhere, and that limit is the category of what counts as human. By marginalizing a gay-specific read of *Brokeback Mountain*—mirroring the marginalization of LGBT people in society at large—the universal approach, in some ways, retains gayness in the role of different/other and excludes it from the realm of universal. Further, people who see gayness as central/primary to understanding this story (where the universalizing above makes it secondary and incidental) are not allowed to participate in the same rhetorical field as assimilationist writers. To the extent that *Brokeback* achieved the role of posterchild for the cause of LGBT rights, this exclusion put them outside of the movement itself. Additionally, all those not literally represented in the text are not represented in the movement. Or worse, what if someone did not like or did not connect with the movie? They too were rhetorically excluded from participation in a movement whose public rhetoric revolved around supporting *Brokeback Mountain*.

This leads me to the second limit. Assimilationist rhetoric set up an impossible measure of success. Just like GLAAD’s annual “Where We Are on TV” report which counts the number of LGBT characters on broadcast and cable television, assimilationist rhetoric cannot be fully satisfied. There will always need to be another goal in order for any “movement” to continue, but assimilationist rhetoric works in singular teleological terms. Stemming from the linear understanding of the public sphere, success is mapped onto a set of goals for inclusion. GLAAD praises or criticizes the media for the level of LGBT representation each year. The tacit assumption of such a goal is that there is a magic number of representations that, once reached, will signify the attainment of equality. The previous limitation shows how this is never fully possible. A look at the

current political landscape may help support the importance of moving beyond numbers. The Bush Administration is the most demographically diverse of any White House to date (Page, 2004). Yet the policies produced by this administration are clearly not receptive to the concerns of minorities in general and sexual minorities in particular. So while the administration has assimilated these groups, it has not integrated their needs and desires into its own goals.

A third limitation of assimilationist rhetoric as it appears in *Brokeback* discourse is the use of apolitical personalizing as a strategy to identify the universalism central to its goals. Like the highlighting of the emotional authenticity of the characters, this tactic centers on the liberal humanist identity. The notable downside of this identitarian politics of personalization is that it largely denies systemic qualities of homophobia and centers rather on the personal emotions of the characters. When it comes to seeking solutions, then, long-term programs of tolerance may be more easily substituted by short term-protections of personal rights. This may be more a limitation of a movie functioning as a political medium rather than an intrinsic aspect of assimilationist rhetoric, but it is highly present in this discourse.

Despite these limitations, assimilationist rhetoric as a political strategy is uniquely capable of gaining a foothold in mainstream institutions. The trope of universalism and the focus on sameness makes the movie (and its politics) more palatable to unfamiliar audiences. This tends to lead toward wider appeal; indeed it is hard to conceive of *Brokeback Mountain* reaching as many theaters as it did had not the mainstream press largely pushed a universalizing read of it. The movie's distributor had been quoted as hoping it may reach 800 to 1,200 theaters at most (Nevius, 2006). By its widest release

on February 3 it was playing in 2,089 (Mojo, 2007) and is still the highest grossing film for Focus Features, with almost three times their next highest (Goldstein, 2007)!

In closing, if the political field is understood (or, for that matter, constituted) as unitary, then productive political efforts must be made in the form of attempts to gain entrance into that whole. I have described in this chapter how *Brokeback Mountain* was implemented by supporters of assimilationist rhetoric in order to exploit just such a political sphere. It was called a western in order to establish it as groundbreaking, a story of forbidden love to make it universal, and a gay cowboy movie to make it political (or denied in order to add to the universal). In the political field established by assimilationist rhetoric, each of these was an explicitly political move. Of course these were not the only possibilities. As the next chapter shows, other sources used a quite different type of rhetoric which constituted a different political field.

CHAPTER THREE

GO BLOG IT ON THE *MOUNTAIN*:

INTEGRATIONIST RHETORIC AND THE PROCESS OF CIRCULATION

While the assimilationist rhetoric I explored in the previous chapter was pervasive in the mainstream print media's discourse around *Brokeback Mountain*, it was not the only rhetorical option for LGBT advocates. However, since the vast majority of mainstream supporters of LGBT rights as well as the major advocacy organizations used primarily (and often only) an assimilationist rhetorical frame, it was largely made to appear as the sole possibility. A major purpose of this project is to highlight the multiple and strategic aspects of rhetoric as it relates to LGBT people and rights. The previous chapter highlighted the strategy of focusing discursive attention on accessing a centralized public sphere and the tactics of universalizing and strategic politicizing implemented to that end. This chapter outlines another rhetorical orientation: integrationist rhetoric.

Defenders of assimilationist rhetoric were often tenacious in support of their aims, as was perhaps best demonstrated by some of the harsher post-Oscar statements calling Academy voters "conservative heffalumps" and the like. Nonetheless, an alternative rhetorical strategy also found voice in the public discourse around *Brokeback Mountain*. However, it did not as readily appear in the same media. Importantly, just as with assimilationist rhetoric, the qualities and implications of integrationist rhetoric were closely tied to a specific model of the public sphere within which it functioned. As we saw in the previous chapter, assimilationist rhetoric constituted a singular and unitary

public sphere and functioned under the assumptions of such a model. Integrationist rhetoric, however, articulated a circulation model of publics and counterpublics and invoked different priorities. Each model constituted different restraints and enabled different possibilities, so we must be conscious of the model in order to fully understand the rhetoric.

In this chapter I first describe how weblogs—now commonly known simply as blogs—as a medium support the proliferation of circulation and why that makes them especially amenable to a model of counterpublics as forwarded by Michael Warner (2002) and others (and outlined in the first chapter of this thesis). I then add support for that model by looking at the interaction between assimilationist and integrationist rhetoric in the discourse on *Brokeback Mountain* and highlighting the crossover between "mainstream" print media and "alternative" media such as blogs. While not exclusively so, assimilationist rhetoric was more prominent in mainstream print media and integrationist rhetoric found its voice largely in online blogging communities. I explore the implications of the blogging form of media and circulation for integrationist arguments. Once we understand how it functioned within a public sphere understood as multiple interaction publics, I explicate the specific rhetorical appeals of integrationist rhetoric in order that I may compare it with assimilationist rhetoric and highlight their respective strategic value for the LGBT movement. As I suggest, integrationist rhetoric around *Brokeback Mountain* had four main aspects: it foregrounded gayness, was explicitly critical, forwarded a world-making discourse, and attended closely to process over telos and results. I conclude with a description of the limitations and possibilities of integrationist rhetoric. If, as I argue in the first chapter, *Brokeback Mountain* was

constituted differently by different rhetorics which evoked it, we can only fully understand the movie itself if we understand how it functioned within specific rhetorical strategies.

Brokeback Mountain is, like all works of art, culturally situated in a specific time and place. Therefore an understanding of both integrationist and assimilationist rhetoric will help us better understand the multiple ways in which it was put to political use by different communities. As a rhetorical artifact, however, it is also always already circulating and changing; it is inherently polysemous. Nonetheless the contemporary discourses on sexuality make certain understandings more or less possible. The dominant cultural discourses, to the extent that the mainstream print media of the previous chapter were indicative of them, seem to have had a vested interest in forwarding the assimilationist rhetorical read of *Brokeback*. It is therefore my role as a cultural critic to understand why and to propose alternatives. This chapter looks at integrationist rhetoric as one such alternative.

Circulating Integrationist Rhetoric

Just as the assimilationist rhetoric of the last chapter was implemented within a unitary conception of the public sphere and functioned primarily in media formulated to communicate in such a sphere (such as mass-media print periodicals), integrationist rhetoric was necessarily located primarily in different media. In the discourse on *Brokeback Mountain*, this meant blogs. In this chapter I turn my attention toward an integrationist counterpublic as expressed in online blogs. This medium is well suited to

the likes of Warner's public sphere model of multiple interacting publics and is especially linked to the concept of circulation.

In fact, according to Warner, the very definition of a public is tied to its ability to circulate ideas. Warner imagines publics as "the social space created by the reflexive circulation of discourse" (2002, p. 67). Without the continuation of circulation, a public would no longer exist according to this model. Other scholars further explore "circulation as a constitutive process" (Finnegan & Jiyeon, 2004, p. 393). When conceived in that way circulation calls into question a few core assumptions of public sphere theory. In particular, the ideas of dialogue and rational-critical debate are problematized. Ron Greene (2002) likens this circulation model to Derrida's idea of dissemination—a conception also forwarded by Peters (1999) and DeLuca & Peeples (2002). As Greene argues, communication as circulation complicates traditional models of communication. For instance, "[Warner's] emphasis on circulation challenges the assumptions of communication models to explore the idea of a public through its relational understanding of self and other… and the norms envisioned for this communication encounter" (pp. 435-436). Basically, the traditional models which understand a discrete message being transmitted between discrete subjects, no longer inhere in light of poststructuralist understandings of decentered subjectivity and performative citationality. Others also recognize this incompatibility. Lee and LiPuma seek to overcome confusion and inconsistent usage by coining the term "cultures of circulation" as a way to acknowledge the constitutive forces of circulation and the citational quality of performativity (2002, p. 192). They see a problematic tendency of performativity being tied to the creation of meaning and circulation as the transition of meaning. Rather,

"cultures of circulation" reveals the two concepts to be far more similar. All in all, circulation has become a key term in contemporary discussions of public discourse.

Returning to circulation as it relates specifically to blogs, Warner states that "Anything that addresses a public is meant to undergo circulation" (2002, p. 91). What he means is that circulation is inherent to being public in the first place. If something is not meant to be circulated (i.e. a diary or personal correspondence) it is not part of a public. This helps, in part, overcome the public/private dualism which defines private conversation as occurring in the home and public discourse in officially sanctioned locales which exclude women and minorities. Fraser (1990) further highlights the importance of "private" discourse in recognizing "official-economic system institutions" in place of simply "the public sphere" in order to recognize how domestic institutions are also economic.

For a counterpublic, whose aim is directly to influence other publics, circulation as the central model of public discourse allows for counterpublics to forward discourse where the model of success is not mainstream acceptance (as it was for assimilationist rhetoric's unitary public sphere), but continued circulation itself. If circulation is seen as constitutive, Greene notes how "publics and counterpublics are more than spaces of persuasion; they are poetic-expressive forces that imagine particular worlds of stranger sociability" (2002, p. 438). This process of circulation is inherently constitutive in its citationality and affirming in its creation of a livable space for certain subjectivities, despite their inclusion/exclusion within larger publics. As long as people are talking about it, the possibilities are made available. In this way, circulation itself is the aim, not rational-critical debate. Rationality cannot hold consistent among multiple publics with

different cultural priorities, but circulation can. The unitary public sphere of Habermas's ideal focused its rhetorical force at changing the state; publics in the circulation model focus on constituting a more livable world and transforming larger publics.

Blogs are especially suited for the circulation model because they help the continued circulation of discourse by providing more opportunities for citationality. That is not to say they cannot be used to advocate other centralizing public discourse as well; a large number of both blogs advocating assimilationist and integrationist rhetoric included links to other blogs, reviews, or related news stories. In this section I outline the interaction of blogs and mainstream press on the topic of *Brokeback Mountain*. In so doing, I will set up a few key generic qualities of blogs that (in)form integrationist rhetorical strategies.

Blogs are also particularly relevant to contemporary discussions of circulating public discourse. As a form of expression, they are quickly finding a place in political journalism. Their role as the investigative reporters of the 21st century is aided by the medium's ability for depth and speed in reporting information. For example, Talking Points Memo (TPM), a journalistic political blog, is largely responsible for breaking the story of the Bush administration's firing of eight U.S. attorneys in 2006. For two months from December 2006, TPM accumulated evidence from contributors around the country using their blog as a coordinating tool. Their efforts led to a media and political scandal that permeated mainstream press. Talking Points Memo is lauded as an example of the new journalistic abilities opened by blogs such as massive and speedy collaboration and pooling of effort (McDermott, 2007).

Additionally, blogging is credited as a medium which fosters more participatory and open models of communication. Popular blogs typically receive hundreds of comments on any given post from readers sharing their responses to the ideas. A *Los Angeles Times* article dramatizes the scope; Economist Duncan Black "posted a short note saying he would not be writing much that day as he was going to be traveling. Within the hour, 492 people posted comments on that. A political reporter at a metropolitan daily might not get that much reader response in a year" (McDermott, 2007). Even smaller personal blogs typically receive a few responses on posts at least occasionally.

This ability for quick and easy response not only documents the traditionally oral process of circulation in ways not possible before, but it is also a crucial aid in the continued circulation of publics. As Warner describes, publics lack any institutional being. Rather, publics "commence with the moment of attention, must continually predicate new attention, and cease to exist when attention is no longer predicated" (Warner, 2002, p. 88). In other words, publics exist only to the extent that their discourses continue to circulate. Where circulation is the model of success, blogging seems well suited to succeeding with low barriers to participation and interaction.

While I have been focusing on the public discursive relevance of blogs, this is not to discount the personal(izing) qualities of blogs. A study by The (We)blog Research on Genre Project (BROG) which empirically categorizes blog characteristics, found that over 70% were explicitly personal in nature (Herring, Scheidt, Bonus, & Wright, 2005, p. 153). This characterization also holds up in my analysis of *Brokeback* discourse; most posts contained a primary focus on personal responses and interpretations as I will

discuss below. Nonetheless, I disagree with BROG's conclusion that this personal focus indicates a diminished interlinking quality of blogs.[6] What their analysis discounts are both the implicit and explicit ways these personally-focused blogs connect to political implications. For even personal entries have a world-making logic supporting them. That is, the personal rhetoric affirms certain kinds of lives and actions. It is world-making to the extent that such rhetoric is constitutive of certain subjectivities, even if they are made unavailable or unappreciated in the larger public. Of course, *every* blog entry I read for this project also participated explicitly in some sort of circulation simply by addressing *Brokeback Mountain*. But even if scholars tend to overemphasize the interlinking per se (as in literally hyperlinking to other blogs or documents), the circulation of discourse is clear.

But literal interlinking is not the only aspect of circulation anyway. Taking the idea further, circulating discourse calls into question the very distinction between mainstream press and alternative media such as blogs. For example, Mickey Kaus is most popular for his blog Kausfiles.com, which is also carried on Slate.com. His statements on *Brokeback Mountain* were used regularly by mainstream print writers as a few examples in the previous chapter demonstrate. (In a similar way, the Drudge Report's early November 2005 post on the movie was widely cited in print media as well.) On the other end of the spectrum is Andy Towle. His blog, Towleroad ("A blog with homosexual tendencies"), serves as a popular source for gay-related news online. Towle is a former

[6] They write, "Our analyses revealed less evidence than expected of blogs as interlinked, interactive, and oriented towards external events; rather, most of the blogs in our corpus are individualistic, even intimate, forms of self-expression, and a surprising number of them contain few or no links" (Herring, Scheidt, Bonus, & Wright, 2005, p. 165). Rather, as I will discuss below, blogs discussing *Brokeback* had an innately world-making quality which transcends such easy public/private distinctions.

editor-in-chief of gay men's lifestyle magazine *Genre*. Demonstrating his continued insider sources, Towle was the first to announce at Towleroad on August 16, 2005 that *Entertainment Tonight* would be airing the first preview trailer for *Brokeback Mountain* the following evening (Towle, 2005). This news was picked up by a number of other blogs linking back to Towleroad. In other words Kaus is a blogger cited by mainstream press, Towle is a mainstream press elite cited widely among bloggers. Each of these cases demonstrates the crossover of mainstream press into the blogosphere and vice versa. Discourse cannot be said to fully originate in either location, indeed the very distinction between them becomes increasingly meaningless in some of these marginal cases.

This intertwining is not specific to *Brokeback Mountain*, however; the blogosphere at large has similar examples. Andrew Sullivan was one of the earliest writers to publish online in what is now understood as blogging. Starting in late 2000, his blog became immensely popular after September 11, 2001. Sullivan is the mainstream press equivalent of Andy Towle in the popular gay press. His blog is currently one of the most linked-to on the net. Yet Sullivan is still a major player in traditional outlets. A former editor of *The New Republic*, he recently left *Time Magazine* to work at *Atlantic Monthly*, which now carries his blog. While clearly a staple of mainstream press, his blog is popular in its own right, receiving over 80,000 unique visits per day![7] Moving to the other end of the margin, Josh Marshall began in blogging and became a mainstream influence from there. His blog Talking Points Memo (addressed above) has on occasion led national coverage of political issues. In addition to the case of sacked prosecutors, TPM was the first outlet to provide substantial focus to then-Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott's statement that the country would be better off had Strom Thurmond's 1948

[7] As of March 21, 2007. See: http://www.sitemeter.com/?a=stats&s=sm3DishStats

segregationist presidential campaign succeeded. The resulting uproar cost Lott his leadership position. Lawrence Lessig affirms the centrality of blogs in this process. Although the story "disappear[ed] from the mainstream press within forty-eight hours… bloggers kept researching the story" until, "finally, the story broke back into the mainstream press" (2004, p. 43). It would not have been possible without the blogging medium and bloggers like Marshall who exploited its potential.

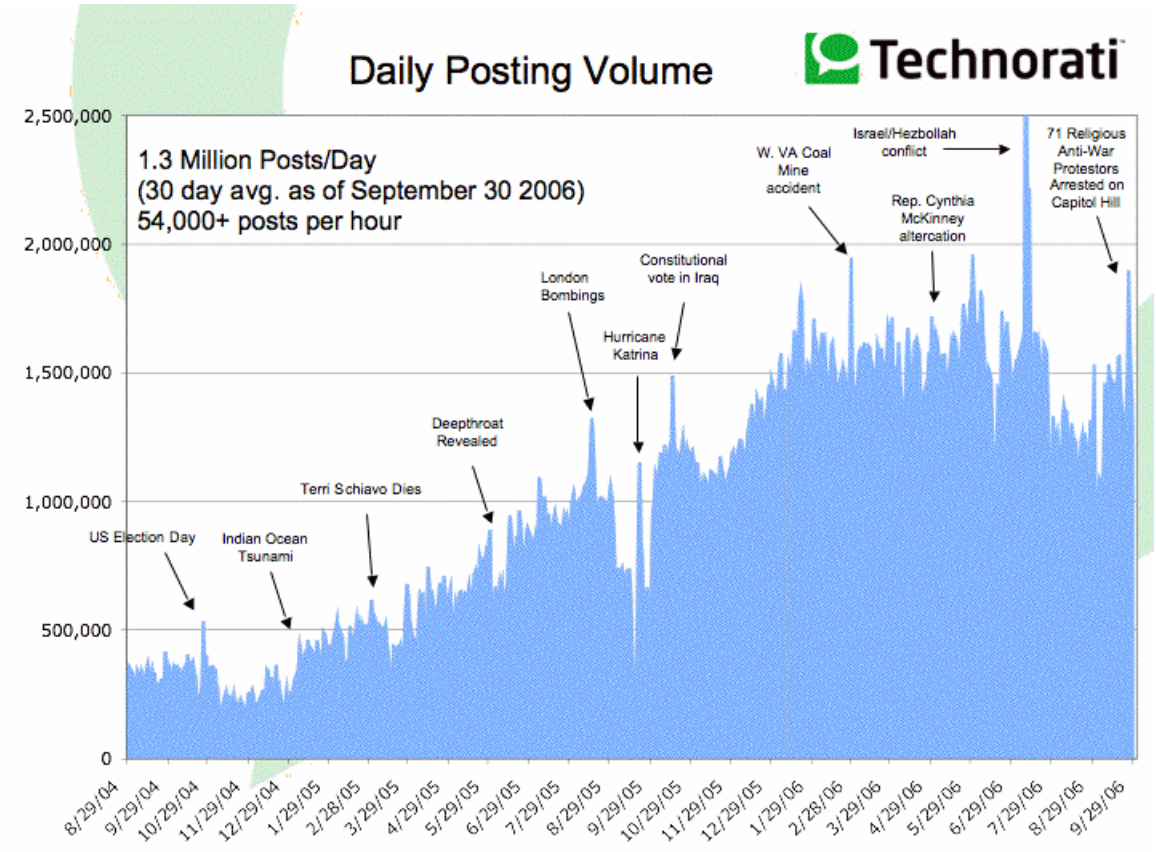
Blogging is not only for journalists, however. Political candidates have increasing online presences as well. As one of the more extensive examples, John Edwards' campaign for the 2008 Democratic Party presidential nomination has profiles on over twenty major social networking sites.[8] He even has a campaign headquarters in the virtual world Second Life (which received brief attention by mainstream media when it was digitally vandalized in late February 2007). It is almost unheard of these days for a major candidate not to at least have some form of a blog.

Mainstream news networks are even beginning to directly include blogging in their programming. MSNBC was the first with its show *Connected: Coast to Coast* which ran from February to December 2005. For CNN, blogs are featured on Wolf Blitzer's *Situation Room* in a segment called "The Situation Online." Fox News has just launched its own take: *It's Out There*. Major networks have also covered political events such as the 2005 national conventions with live blogging, where bloggers simultaneously wrote about the event coverage and participated in televised updates.

All of this attention has helped the blogging medium grow exponentially over the last few years. The blogosphere is over 60 times bigger than it was only 3 years ago

[8] http://johnedwards.com/action/networking/

(Sifry, 2007). The following graph gives context of total blog posting over this time period as well as world events that have received particular attention (Sifry, 2006).



One of the few spikes they do not identify with an event finds its peak in late January 2006, the same time *Brokeback Mountain* reaches maximum release as well as the time of the Golden Globes. That is not to say *Brokeback* was necessarily responsible for the spike alone, but it undoubtedly contributed to it.

In the case of *Brokeback Mountain*, mainstream press picked up on Internet discussions, and blogs devoured the print media news. Although *Brokeback* first began slowly but noticeably encroaching on the mainstream press in early September 2005 after winning the Venice Film Festival's prestigious Golden Lion, many blogs had already been following it for months, if not longer. One early blog post entitled "Giddy Up"

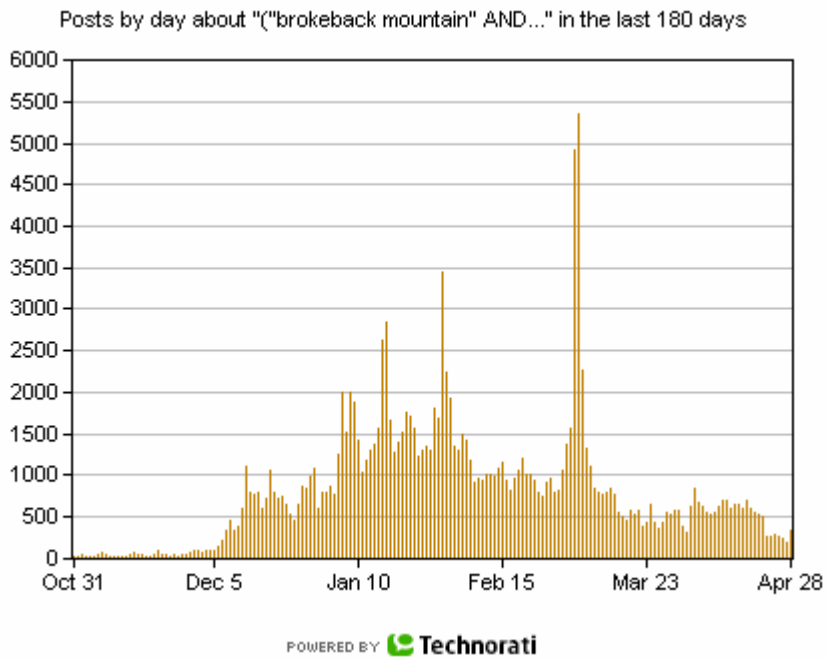
demonstrated the excitement of the building hype, “Jake Gyllenhaal. Heath Ledger. Playing gay cowboys. If there is a plot to *Brokeback Mountain*, most fans are not ashamed to say that they don’t really care…. Mark your calendars – *Brokeback Mountain* gallops into theaters in exactly 142 days” (Atwal, 2005). A reader comment below the post also established that people had indeed been following the movie for years, “My friends and I have been salivating over this for almost 2 years. Thank goodness the wait is coming to an end.”

Mainstream press was aware of this early blog discourse. An early 2004 *Chicago Sun-Times* article demonstrated the connection,

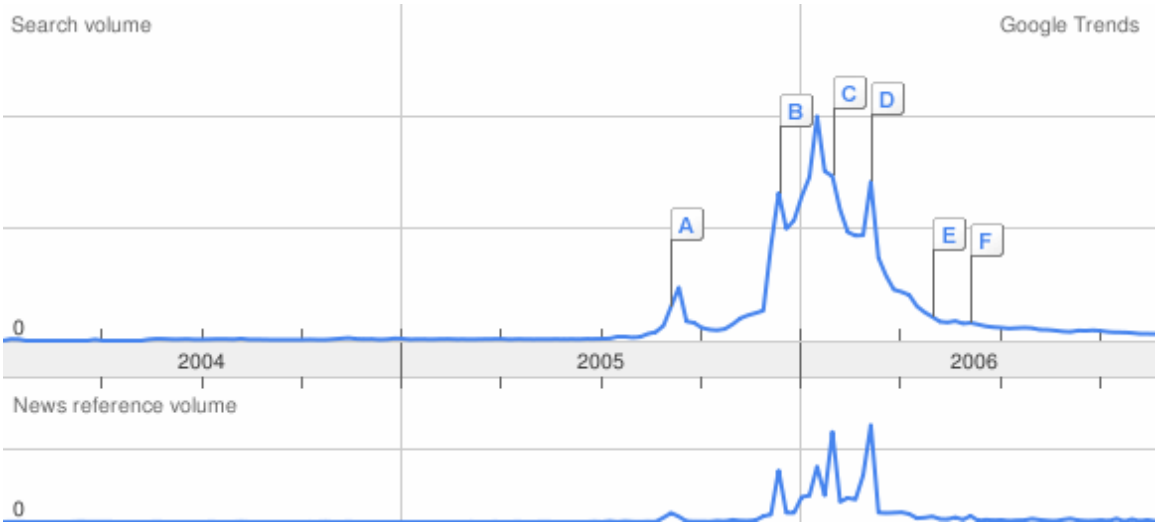
> In the months since Ang Lee announced that he would direct the movie, fans have taken to Internet chat rooms with a vengeance, begging the unhearing movie gods to cast everyone from Viggo Mortensen and Brad Pitt, or Jude Law and Benicio Del Toro, or Joaquin Phoenix and Johnny Depp. (Traister, 2004)

While more localized and less contentious than it would become, early hype on blogs was circulating discourse about the movie long before its release. Other early news reports similarly highlighted the online hype as the movie entered wider release.

More and more blogs started noticeably picking up on *Brokeback Mountain* in early December 2005, reaching almost a thousand posts per day throughout the month. The following chart shows the frequency of posts on English language blogs from October 31, 2005 through April 28, 2006 according to popular blog tracking site Technorati:



The large spike is centered on March 5th, the day of the Academy Awards. Other spikes correlate with the movie's gradually wider release (weekend spikes throughout January) and the Golden Globes. By comparison, the following Google Trends graph of news volume for "*Brokeback Mountain*" below shows a similar amount of general news coverage related to the movie.



See the note below for the stories referenced by each letter.[9] Clearly the blogs and press were circulating similar discourse even down to the relative volume of attention, with spikes centered around roughly the same periods. As befits a circulating model of publics, the blogs and press continued to circulate discourse on matters of national interest; or rather, matters of national interest were defined by that which was circulated through blogs and press. As I mentioned above, this circulation is not as easily described as blogs responding to what issues mainstream press set for them. Blog discourse was an influence on press coverage as well.

While I focus in the rest of this chapter on locating voices of integrationist rhetoric dealing with *Brokeback Mountain* on the Internet, that is not to say there was not a huge contingent of blogs forwarding the assimilationist read from the previous chapter as well. I am in no way claiming integrationist rhetoric to be characteristic of all blog discourse. In fact, to get at least some sense of the relative volume, a Google Blog Search for "*Brokeback Mountain*" (in quotes) currently reveals almost 97,000 results. Add "gay" as a second search term, however, and it drops to 23,000. How can three quarters of blog discourse about the so-called "gay cowboy movie" not mention the word gay? One explanation may be the pervasive influence of universalizing assimilationist rhetoric which eschewed the term gay in the ways depicted in the previous chapter. The influence of mainstream media's emphasis on such a model is evident in blog discourse (as some examples below point out). But just because it was advocated by only a minority of blogs does not mean integrationist rhetoric should be easily dismissed. It is the specifically

[9] A: "'Brokeback Mountain' Wins Top Venice Award" - Petoskey News-Review - Sep 10 2005; B: "'Brokeback Mountain' Leads Globe Nods" - Beloit Daily News - Dec 13 2005; C: "'Brokeback Mountain' Gets 8 Oscar Nods" - Canton Daily Ledger - Jan 31 2006; D: "Brokeback Mountain Crash" - National Ledger - Mar 6 2006; E: "Actor Randy Quaid drops lawsuit over 'Brokeback Mountain' pay" - Columbus Ledger-Enquirer - May 4 2006; F: "Best Kiss: Brokeback Mountain" - Truthdig - Jun 4 2006.

counterpublic model of public discourse which drives integrationist rhetoric. In the next section I will further detail the generic qualities of blogs which are relevant to *Brokeback* discourse in order to set up my discussion of integrationist rhetoric in particular.

Blogging as Medium and Genre

Understanding this specific circulation model of publics and counterpublics is important to understand integrationist rhetoric and its functions. Both the form established by the blogs as a medium of communication and their generic expectations are important to understanding their relation to integrationist rhetoric and its circulation. In the rest of this section I explore the structural form of blogs as well as their generic qualities. As I show, the blogosphere is a medium with communicative structures which easily facilitate circulation and citation. Additionally, blogs function within generic expectations which encourage a personal focus of world-making discourse.

Blogging as Medium

The structure of blogs and the Internet help to make blogging a communication medium that encourages the wide circulation of discourse and citationality of ideas. Blogs discussing *Brokeback Mountain* frequently cited reviews from mainstream press or other bloggers in their posts. This one was typical in citing a review then evaluating their take on it,

> For two glorious sentences, we thought that the *NY Times* just might be using a *Brokeback Mountain* review to launch the initial installment of a major daily newspaper's first-ever serialized erotic novel: "THE lonesome chill that seeps

> through Ang Lee's epic western, *Brokeback Mountain*, is as bone deep as the movie's heartbreaking story of two cowboys who fall in love almost by accident. It is embedded in the craggy landscape where their idyll begins and ends." Unfortunately… the piece abandons its early, literary smut pretensions and devolves into a sober review of the much anticipated gay cowboy movie. (Lisanti, 2005)

Here the blogger took a negative view of the review, but citing it exposed the discursive path leading to the post itself. Others linked to articles with a more positive valence. This one linked to the same *NY Times* article but kept a positive perspective of it in the context of excited preparation for the movie: "make sure you read the glowing *New York Times* review and the Annie Proulx story that inspired the film—since you wouldn't want anyone thinking you were only interested in all that hot male-on-male cowboy action for the nude scenes, would you?" (Mac, 2005). Regardless of their evaluation, this form of direct citation explicitly grounded bloggers' claims in previous discourse in addition to the always-already present citationality on the cultural-normative level.

Others took a different approach to interlinking. Bloody Red Carpet's movie reviews are full of seemingly random or tangential links to other websites and news stories. In the review of *Brokeback Mountain* one section read (links are in bold followed by a description):

> We will admit that we had two disparate reactions to the love affair in this film. One, we just loved seeing the **boys rustle up** [an ESPN article on bareback bronc riding] some cowbooty and **swap spit** [Wikipedia article on "Snowballing (sexual practice)"], and two, we hated feeling that they were justified in **hiding their love**

> [CNN article on gay former NJ governor McGreevey]. We had to step back and realize that yes, indeed this was a period piece – sadly with some present day equivalents, but still and all not indicative of a **modern gay lifestyle** [an all-gay vacation site]. (Carpet, 2005)

This technique is not uncommon in blogging. It serves to locate the current topic explicitly in an intertextual web of discourses that influence our conceptions of the issue. In the terminology of Deleuze and Guattari (1987) the Internet is by design more rhizomatic (a multiplicity of relationships and lines of flight which rupture any attempt at coherent narrative) than arborescent (a hierarchical and coherent structure with a singularly defined origin). Blogging facilitates this structure by exploiting the hypertextual capabilities of the Internet.

One result of these structures of circulation is an increasingly localized and fragmented audience. So for blogs, the idea of audience is significantly different than for mainstream print media. Just as public discourse in traditional unitary public sphere is ultimately aimed at the state, under a circulation model it is far more multidirectional. Rhetors may direct their attention to the state, other publics, or internally to a single (counter)public. But even then, the intentions of the rhetor do not determine the ultimate audience of circulating rhetoric, the dissemination model of discourse prevents such limiting ideas in most instances. Some prominent examples of unintentional circulation have surfaced as popular videos such as the “Star Wars Kid” which became widespread on the Internet in May 2003. The video has been viewed over 900 million times (BBC, 2006) and has dozens of remixes available on YouTube. Here the easy use of

hyperlinking on blogs (in addition to related mediums such as email) helped this video circulate to a huge (and unintended) audience.

Nonetheless, the audience of a typical blog is significantly smaller than mainstream print media (except perhaps for a few so-called A-list elite bloggers such as Sullivan, Marshall, Kaus, Towle, and Drudge mentioned above). The smaller audience is both a result of and contributes to the more personal focus discussed in the next section. Such small focused audiences are amenable to fragmented counterpublics and allow opportunities for discourse to circulate internally through counterpublics before being directed more widely. Nancy Fraser has identified such arenas as subaltern counterpublics of "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses… [and] formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs" (1990, p. 67) Fraser argues that these can function both as "spaces of withdrawal and regroupment… and training grounds for agitation activities directed toward wider publics" (p. 68). These functions of creating counterdiscourses must not be construed as returning to a rational-critical model of discursive interaction. While largely receptive to her ideas, Michael Warner makes that mistake. He critiques Fraser's model as conforming to the same limits of Habermas's public sphere of opinion formation and for not sufficiently articulating what makes such publics "counter" (2002, p. 118). I think this is a misread of Fraser. As she states, "public spheres are not only arenas for the formation of discursive opinion; in addition, they are arenas for the formation and enactment of social identities" (1990, p. 68). This formation of identity is central to any successful contemporary counterpublic's ability to constitute the more livable world its members seek. Fraser notes the importance of "identity

construction in relation to public spheres" as opposed to what she sees as the misplaced attention by feminists to psychoanalytic models of identity. (pp. 79, note 25). Of course, Judith Butler would famously merge those two spheres and fully develop a psychoanalytic account of social identity and performativity in *Gender Trouble* (1999) that same year. For Butler, it was the discursive interaction itself that constitutes identity through the citation and/or subversion of behavior norms.

Because of the nature of the cost of access to larger disseminating print media, counterpublics are less visible in widely circulated mainstream press. However, with the advent of massive opportunities for cheap, easy communication on the Internet (especially blogs) the likes of Fraser's counterdiscourses, such as that of integrationist rhetors, are newly available. Below I would like to move beyond the form of circulation and look at how these aspects of personalizing scope and fragmented audience (in)form several key qualities of integrationist rhetoric and its rhetorical implications.

Personal Scope

While the technical characteristics of the blogosphere are conducive to circulation and citation, the genre of blogging is also important to understand an analysis of blog discourse. Most important for the present study, blogs tend to focus their discussion on an immanent and personal level. Even expressly political discussions often appear through more personal approaches than one would find in equivalent print media discourse. Again, the analysis from BROG cited above found over 70% of blogs to be expressly personal in nature. Of course, personal in this sense does not imply private as defined

against public. Scholars such as Nancy Fraser (1990) have well argued that the public/private distinction is both sexist and insufficiently simplistic.

Following their personal scope, specific topics addressed by blogs on *Brokeback Mountain* differ from mainstream press. While the central question in the press (as described in the previous chapter) was, "Will *Brokeback* reach mainstream audiences?" the blogs seemed more centrally concerned with "Will it live up to the hype?" This is a significantly different question that cuts across blogs forwarding integrationist and assimilationist rhetoric. The blogging genre sets itself up to answer more personal questions ("did I like it?"). The following quotation is typical:

> i saw *brokeback mountain* last night and i must say that i loved it. i thought that it might not live up to the hype and the expectations i had given it but i thought it was a really beautiful and poignant film. (tweezer, 2006)

Here, the writer expressed both personal opinion about the film and connected that to the widespread hype being built by her and other bloggers alike. Another wrote simply, "It really did live up to the hype. It's devastating" (belledame222, 2005). Again, this response dealt with personal reactions ("it's devastating") as opposed to more widespread cultural musings of Midwest appeal that were far more pervasive in mainstream press than blogs.

While still working with the same question of hype, others were not so satisfied with the movie. A commentator responding to one blog's temperate review of the film wrote, "THANK YOU! I thought I was the only person in Los Angeles County that felt that way. It's a GOOD movie, but it's not the second coming of Hollywood film" (Micah, 2005). Here the author found community with the bloggers more than the people with

whom he saw the film. He described later how he seemed confused why everyone in the theater was sobbing ("Maybe I missed something"). Another blog had similar misgivings about the hype,

> I think the gay community was so delighted by the prospect of seeing gay characters on screen doing something other than comic relief that we built up an expectation of cultural watershed status for this movie, but I don't see that in the cards. The hullaballoo had me waiting expectantly for a big emotional release that just doesn't come. That's not a criticism; *Brokeback* is the cinematic equivalent of blue-balls, but intentionally so. It's a very good movie, and several times I couldn't help thinking that if it weren't for the man-on-man assfucking, it's the kind of thing my dad would really like. (Andy, 2005)

In each case, regardless of their evaluation, the difference in dealing with questions of mainstream acceptance and personalized preference is clear. This is not to say there was no speculation of its mainstream success, just that overall blogs had a more personal scope than mainstream press.

Also on the level of topic, the personalization was at times expressed as visceral attraction:

> If the thought of Jake Gyllenhaal and Heath Ledger together doesn't get you all hot and bothered, then may the everlasting fires of Angelina Jolie's thighs thaw your frigid, icy loins. I have also used a sophisticated regression algorithm to determine a rating for this movie:
>
> 1 star for Ang Lee having the grapes to do this movie
>
> 1 star for Jake Gyllenhaal being a hot cowboy

1 star for Heath Ledger being a hot cowboy

1 star for Jake and Heath being gay and hot together

1 star for making me hot and bothered

= 5 stars total (smackmaster, 2005)

This type of post was fairly common among blogs. Integrationist rhetors in particular, most of who were gay men, gave voice to the inner yearnings for two attractive young actors to get intimate on the big screen. As another example, "I need to give my review of *Brokeback Mountain* (let's just say that more than just my thumbs were up)" (Lion, 2005). Nonetheless, this type of reaction was not exclusive to gay men. Some women also voiced similar desires. This post, for example, came from a self-identified straight woman, "the eye candy for the ladies (and men-loving males) in this movie is clearly out of control (in an extremely delicious, please-touch-me-in-naughty-places-Jakey way)" (Roonie, 2006). Keeping the focus on personal desire and attraction, this writer retained the over-the-top camp of the gay bloggers. Even straight men were not left out of the sexual appeal. One of the most popular articles on *Brokeback* was an essay posted to MSNBC.com by blogger/movie critic Dave White, "The Straight Dude's Guide to *Brokeback*." It humorously, but seriously, listed seven ways straight men could prepare themselves if forced to see the movie. This one came in at number six: "Anne Hathaway, who plays AJ's [Adorable Jake] wife, gets topless" (White, 2005). Clearly from these examples, there was enough visceral attraction to go around when it came to *Brokeback Mountain*.

Even in more explicitly political discussions of *Brokeback Mountain*, many blogs enacted a political ideology by making connections from their personal experiences (or those of the characters) to larger political contexts,

> While American society as a whole no longer enforces the kind of repression which ultimately undermines this love story and its all-too-human protagonists, the Christian community still does. Those among us who so easily prescribe lifelong celibacy for our gay brothers and sisters, thereby denying them any hope for the nurture and security of marriage, would do well to consider *Brokeback Mountain*'s heartbreaking portrayal of the consequences of such denials.(Campolo, 2006)

Here, the personal forces of repression and love were foregrounded while remaining contextualized within larger social forces. The writer drew out those themes from the level of immanent experience so that the political quality of the film was seen as emerging from the personal. This sort of personalizing focus was a central generic expectation set up by blogs.

Integrationist Rhetoric

I will now identify the specifically integrationist rhetoric in blog discourse on *Brokeback Mountain*. This section is at once descriptive and prescriptive. I piece together these integrationist rhetorical characteristics from online rhetors who used a strain of rhetoric strategically at odds with the more unified assimilationist rhetoric. In true counterpublic form, it is best described by its opposition to a larger public (in this case, both mainstream straight majority and a larger assimilationist-rhetoric-using LGBT

counterpublic). But in order to maximize its strategic possibilities, I am also prescriptive in outlining four coherent aspects of this rhetoric so that a specifically integrationist quality may be both understood and consciously implemented by rhetorical communities. While I draw on queer scholars such as Michael Warner and Judith Butler for some of the general qualities of integrationist rhetoric, the specifics aspects below are my own and are designed to apply a particularly rhetorical perspective to the matter by outlining the major strategies employed by integrationist rhetors on *Brokeback Mountain*. Below I describe these key qualities as foregrounding gay subjectivity, explicitly criticizing alternative worldviews, constituting a queer world, and attending centrally to process.

1. Foregrounding Gay Experience

Following the personal(izing) qualities in the blog form and the smaller LGBT-focused audience, integrationist bloggers advocated the importance of the gay experiences of these characters.

> It stuns me when people say this isn't a "gay movie." Of course it's a "gay movie." It's a movie that others can relate to, no doubt -- to the themes of the barriers that one faces with love, of the power of love, and of the tragedy that love can lead us to -- but to say it's not a gay movie is like saying *Uncle Tom's Cabin* isn't about race. (tessaj, 2006)

This example highlights the central relevance gayness played to the story. By comparing sexuality in *Brokeback* to race in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the author sought to establish the absurdity of an understanding of *Brokeback Mountain* that neglects sexuality. In integrationist rhetoric this context of social oppression was seen as centrally important to

the story and the experience of LGBT people's lives. Another responded to the same tendencies of mainstream critics, "The insistence of many critics that this [is] indistinguishable from straight romance to anyone who isn't a bigot is absurd" (Gibson, 2005). Where "straight romance" is understood as an acceptable genre for mainstream society, "gay romance" is not. This writer questioned the use of critical statements seeking acceptance by placing the movie into the "straight romance" category as denying the gayness and ultimately counterproductive. Rather, his affirmation of the gay romance label sought to expand the understanding of what is acceptable to include a "gay romance" on its own.

Another post came to a similar conclusion, "*Brokeback Mountain* may be a movie with a universal theme -- love denied -- but the specifics of it are not universal at all" (Ace, 2005). Largely responding to the common denials of the "Gay Cowboy Movie" title (especially by assimilationist rhetoric), statements such as these called out the experiences only *gay* cowboys could have and their importance to understanding the movie and its relevance. This insight was not only from people with explicitly gay/queer background experiences, however; the following post by a self-identified straight man made a related claim, "Of course it probably sounds a bit simplistic to keeping pigeonholing the film as a 'gay cowboy movie' but that's exactly what it is" (Tyler, 2005). Another blogger elaborated on why that understanding was important, "the men in this film would not have a problem, and thus there would be no story, if they were not gay. So perhaps 'gay love story' is accurate" (Varkentine, 2005).

In other places, integrationist rhetors highlighted the transitory nature of identity by refusing either the gay or straight label for these characters, "*Brokeback Mountain* is

about bi shepherds, not gay cowboys"(Grundy, 2005). This author took aim at the tendency by most coverage to identify the main characters as gay despite the fact that they also have sex with women. Another blogger made a similar claim, "After the movie, you will realise[sic] *Brokeback Mountain* is NOT a gay movie but a bisexual movie" (^momo^, 2006). These writers identified the misunderstandings that may result from the overreliance on strict labels in understanding *Brokeback Mountain*. Another writer was even more explicit, "These are NOT gay cowboys… Heath Ledger and Jake Gyllynhhll are bi-curious cowboys. At best" (Headset, 2005). The final line, "at best" called into question the ability of labels to even fully function in this case. If a label is to signify some core essence, then it must do so exactly lest it lose its usefulness.

This quality of foregrounding the specific gay subjectivities of these characters was the most obvious difference between integrationist and assimilationist rhetoric on *Brokeback*. It was in direct conflict with the universalizing liberal humanist approach described in the previous chapter. Focusing on difference, the integrationist approach functioned in a sphere of multiple publics. Where counterpublics are in part defined by their oppression, the way integrationist rhetors evoked gayness was designed to remove the stigma of "other" from the quality of difference and highlight *Brokeback*'s ability to make it familiar. Each one has different experiences and backgrounds and public interaction is not about entering a single unified public but that of allowing each public a voice of its own. These rhetors were trying to use that voice in the statements above. Integrationist rhetors sought to expand the realm of the acceptable, not to fit LGBT people into existing subjective possibilities.

2. Expressly Critical of Competing Rhetorics

In many ways a necessity brought about in response to the clear disconnect between the rhetorical strategies of integrationist and assimilationist counterpublics (as highlighted by the first quality of foregrounding gayness), integrationist rhetoric also took on an expressly critical form. In particular, integrationist rhetors writing on *Brokeback Mountain* were critical of mainstream discourse using assimilationist rhetoric and the implications for LGBT people. Often this revolved around responding to denials of the "gay cowboy movie" label.

> Here it is, the Gay Cowboy Movie. I'm not supposed to call it that, I know. Months of studio hype and preemptive finger-wagging (looking at you, Jeffrey Wells) have gone into the goal of telling people NOT to call this The Gay Cowboy Movie. "It's not a Gay Cowboy Movie," goes the tune, "it's a human story"... "it's a universal love story"... "it's a SAD Cowboy Movie." Guess what? When a studio works THIS hard to convince people that they haven't made "The Gay Cowboy Movie," it usually means they've made "The Gay Cowboy Movie." (Bob, 2005)

This particular post highlighted the strategic/political nature of assimilationist rhetoric (something assimilationist rhetoric strived to transcend) by identifying the dismissal of "gay cowboy" label as a purposeful technique. Here is another similar response to mainstream media's universalizing rhetoric and its neglect of gay experience. Specifically the writer was frustrated at continually reading reviews and bloggers claiming that it is not really a gay movie, "Well, if it's not really a gay movie then why

should I see it? I see plenty of movies that aren't really gay movies. I want to see a gay movie." He continued,

> Some of my feelings about the hype surrounding the category of "gay movie" go back to the period 25-30 years ago when gay themed novels could not get reviewed in the mainstream press…. I vividly remember the first few reviews of explicitly gay novels in the *New York Times Book Review,* … EVERY SINGLE ONE OF THEM criticized the books for not being universal in theme. Yes, really. Because, as we all know, the way for a book to be "universal" is for it to be about straight white people, usually men. (Shaviro, 2003)

Here the blogger connected personal experience and gayness to issues of criticism and its political implications. This past example of book reviews was framed as shortsighted at best, but perhaps even homophobic. That example was made immanently relevant to the current case of *Brokeback Mountain* when connected to the numerous discussions attempting to universalize it just as the books were criticized for in the past. Those connections helped to even more directly highlight the political qualities of the strategically apolitical language of mainstream press (assimilationist rhetoric). Both the personal nature of the blog and the counterpublic audience made it possible.

Elsewhere integrationist rhetors turned their attention on similarly universalizing statements made by the actors during interviews. The following was made by Andy Towle regarding the January 17, 2006 episode of the "Tonight Show,"

> Last night's Tonight Show appearance by Heath Ledger was fairly remarkable, because Ledger and Leno managed to talk for a solid 15 minutes, much of it about Ang Lee and *Brokeback*, and never mention the word gay or anything

> approximating it. Ledger: “I just looked at it as an incredible opportunity to play this, you know...complex, lonely figure...” The omission seemed fairly obvious to me (so obvious that I actually went back and watched the fairly dull interview again), and made me wonder whether or not Heath’s handlers are being calculated about the image of their rising star. Gay is not an easy word to avoid when you’re talking about *Brokeback Mountain*. (Towle, 2006)

This comment drew out not just the qualities of assimilationist universalizing addressed elsewhere, but explicitly connected them to the ideas of image management and public relations. Relating assimilationist rhetoric to this mode of public discourse further highlighted its strategic nature. Others presented related concerns. As an example of circulation within discursive communities, another blog used Towle’s analysis to express his own similar reservations.

> Andy Towle noted one word missing from Heath Ledger’s interview with Jay Leno last night. GAY. I wonder whether it was simply fatigue of talking about the issue (I am sure they’re tired of constantly being asked the same questions) and trying to find new ways to say the same thing, just coincidence or a marketing fear. To his credit, Ledger has been very supportive of the community and comfortable talking about us mo’s. I am not sure what to think, if I should think anything. However, it’s hard not to in light of the G. Globes, Dennis Quaid’s crude joke, and the weird ad campaign for BM that seem to gloss over the central point of the film, two cowboys in love. (Lenington, 2006)

While clearly troubled at the lack of attention to gayness as important to *Brokeback Mountain*, the last blogger seemed still confused how to feel. I believe that was largely

due to a lack of understanding of the available strategic rhetorical options for addressing LGBT rights. As a blogger who implicitly utilized a more integrationist read of the film, he seemed confused at an apparent disconnect: Legder was ostensibly supportive of the LGBT community, but his rhetoric was seen as counterproductive (to the integrationist rhetorical standards of highlighting gayness). It was not a disconnect, however, when one can understand Ledger's statements as conveying an explicitly assimilationist rhetoric. Either way, the critical quality of integrationist rhetoric was clear.

In other places, integrationist rhetors responded to speculation by media critics that Ledger and Gyllenhaal risked their careers by playing these roles.

> Do Jake Gyllenhaal and Heath Ledger really risk alienating their fans just because they are playing gay characters? That seems awfully silly to me, especially when so many other straight actors have done it before them and with no disruption in their careers…. This really wouldn't be such a big deal if the media didn't turn it into one. Every time someone reviews this film they refer to the so-called concerns about the actors' careers, they call it the "gay cowboy movie," they create these pseudo-worries about its content. Yeah, this may do much to make the movie a grater [sic] success, but it's all just silly. (moliberal, 2005)

Again, this blogger highlighted the strategic quality of assimilationist rhetoric's ability to appeal to a wider audience (and "make the movie a greater success"). For many, that became most apparent after its wins at the Golden Globes,

> I will say that NOT using the words 'gay' or 'homosexual' in the publicity or promotion DID actual help Focus win awards and so, PopMuse [the author] admits "I was wrong." But I am still insulted… by this tactic for avoiding the

> ‘gayness’. And what really irritated me last night was with all the awards BB won, not ONE person said the slightest thing about the Gay Aspect of this film. The closest we got was some hideous joke out of (irritated he got stuck presenting the Gay Cowboy Movie) Dennis Quaid’s mouth, “It rhymes with Chick Flick.” Ewww, asshole. (PopMuse, 2006)

Again, integrationist criticism aimed to highlight the strategic nature of assimilationist rhetoric. But while lauding its ability to help win awards, this author was particularly insulted by the tactic’s indirect homophobia. Again foregrounding the personal nature of blogs and the importance of acknowledging *Brokeback*’s gayness for integrationist rhetors, this blogger was highly critical of the tradeoffs implicit with the universalizing approach.

The critical approach of negation by integrationist rhetors often took on a cynical quality. This writer was skeptical about the full message *Brokeback* gave about gays and stereotypes:

> Jack Twist should be the sympathetic character in the film…–and here’s where Director Ang Lee threw me for a loop. There’s an old axiom in Western movies that the Good Guys wear white. The Bad Guys, conversely, get the black cowboy hats…and in Brokeback Mountain, Gyllenhall gets the black hat. Is there a message here, or did Lee wrecklessly[sic] have wardrobe shoose[sic] the outfits without regard to what the choise[sic] of couture may be subconsciously telling the viewer–and mainstream America for that matter–about the gay archetypes being portrayed? (BoiFromTroy, 2005)

This author was largely appreciative of what Lee was trying to do and recognized this movie as seeking to help advance visibility for gay men. Nonetheless, he retained a healthy cynicism, so to speak, and highlighted a limit of the film rooted in the very stereotypes it claimed to transcend.

3. World-Making

In addition to the central role of criticism for the integrationist project, there was also a sense of world-making affirmation. Warner relates the importance of world-making for any public to survive in a sphere of circulating discourse, "Writing to a public helps to make a world insofar as the object of address is brought into being partly by postulating and characterizing it…. Recognized as a real path for the circulation of discourse" (2002, p. 91). In other words, circulation is world-making; it creates a social space. Warner identifies this on the definitional level of publics, "A public is the social space created by the reflexive circulation of discourse" (2002, p. 90). A public must circulate to survive; and as a public is an affirming place of belonging for its members, this instigates a central quality of world-making.

In an interview after writing *The Trouble with Normal*, Warner describes the concept of world-making as coming from Hannah Arendt,

> The idea is that the activity we undertake with each other, in a kind of agonistic performance in which what we become depends on the perspectives and interactions of others, brings into being the space of our world, which is then the background against which we understand ourselves and our belonging. (Jagose, 2000)

Here Warner locates world-making potential in our actions in relation to other people. The interaction itself constitutes certain possibilities and understandings of subjectivity. This closely relates to Judith Butler's conception of performativity. For Butler, existence in relation to others requires social sanction, "As foreclosure, the [social] sanction works not to prohibit existing desire but to produce certain kinds of objects and to bar others from the field of social production" (1997, p. 25). In other words, certain worlds/possibilities are affirmed or denied in our interactions with social spaces and discourses. For publics, this means they have the ability as a discursive community to constitute certain subjectivities, but are nonetheless still subject to larger social sanctions.

The aim of world-making for integrationist rhetoric was in many ways an outgrowth of the personal scope and critical focus described in the previous two sections. World-making occurred in order to normalize gayness and privilege specifically queer/integrationist forms of communication. In a rhetorical situation understood to be co-constitutive, where both the rhetor and the public are constituted through their interaction, world-making can easily be a central part of the rhetorical strategy. Implementing the critical expression described in the previous section, one common example of this world-making in discourse on *Brokeback Mountain* was responding to the mainstream universalizing by affirming the movie's gayness:

> This is a film which deals frankly and bravely with homosexuality in the 60s and 70s. As such, it has virtually nothing in common with mainstream straight dramas. The film grapples with identity in a way we've never seen before in a film of this stature. (Gibson, 2005)

This blogger was clearly at odds with assimilationist rhetoric's tendency to draw on universal(izing) themes in the film rather than impart its explicit gayness. Instead he focused on advocating a more queer-friendly world by both highlighting its unique gayness and still affirming its location outside the mainstream. The author was addressing a queer or queer-friendly audience that upheld the value of gayness for *Brokeback Mountain*.

One particular *Entertainment Weekly* interview found Ledger claiming that kissing Gyllenhaal in the movie was "just like kissing a person." Advocates of integrationist rhetoric found this to be ignorant at best and hurtful in many respects that it posited gayness as unhuman. One such queer blogger wrote,

> they are talkin with one of the actors and the idiot actually says. 'in the end it was just like kissing a person'. no shit sherlock. you were kissing a person. for fuck's sake... i'm sure he meant it to be a positive remark. but its not really. (Dre, 2005)

To the extent that rhetorical strategy was not consciously chosen in this remark, the author was unable to articulate the broader implications of the rhetorical conflict at stake. In the terms used by this project, Ledger was implementing an assimilationist rhetorical strategy. His statement that it was like kissing a person was designed to connect gayness to universal human qualities and therefore allow them political access to the mainstream of a unitary public sphere. This author's frame of reference, however, was clearly that of integrationist rhetoric and multiple publics. This problem of subconscious strategy is precisely one of the exigencies I seek to confront in this project. While multiple approaches to LGBT rights rhetoric are possible—indeed useful and necessary—we

cannot fully exploit them without a more self-conscious understanding of their implications.

Another blogger responded to the same interview but was more aware of the rhetorical implications:

> according to an interview in entertainment weekly with heath ledger. when asked how he felt about kissing a man, he said that he wasn't crazy about doing it and he wouldn't do it again, but that's the job he was being paid to do and he wasn't going to back away from it. i'm okay with that quote because he is straight after all and i really shouldn't expect him to enjoy kissing boys. but here's the rest of the quote: "in the end, it was just like kissing a person." not girl, not woman, not female, but person. implication: gay people aren't actual people; they're kind of sort of like people, but in a lesser form. at this time i would like to offer my rebuttal: heath ledger is not really an actor. he's sort of an actor in that he gets paid to act, only in a lesser form. (jp, 2005)

This post helps highlight another central method of world-making enacted by queer rhetors: sarcasm. Sarcasm, as a form, is specifically suited to the personalized medium of blogs. On a larger level it is part of the privileged discourse of queer culture, and is utilized differently in mainstream culture. Such sarcasm was not available to writers in mainstream print media due to that medium's own generic obligations to appear objective. Yet, as a result of the personal generic expectation of blogs and the queer rhetorical quality, sarcasm was increasingly present in integrationist discussions of *Brokeback Mountain*. The following post was highly sarcastic, but not uncommon among integrationist bloggers,

> *Brokeback Mountain* is a film about two men who just happen to be Cowboys…. Released at a time when America's attitude toward Cowboys is at a delicate tipping point…. As it is, *Brokeback Mountain* serves as a powerful reminder of the conservative forces in society that have always opposed the self-realization of the Cowboy community. But if *Brokeback* could have broken at least some new ground, as did CitySlickers, well, that would have been just soooo fabulous! (L-Guapo, 2006)

Making light of the hype around *Brokeback Mountain* by replacing a focus on oppression of gays for a focus on oppression of cowboys exaggerated the absurdity of the rhetoric in order to critique the limits of its methodology. This author, like many integrationist rhetors, found the assimilationist approach to LGBT rights ineffective. Such sarcasm was present in varying doses in a large number of integrationist posts. This sort of campy, over-the-top sarcastic wit was an especially privileged form of ethos in the queer community. This was part of a world-making enactment. Another example:

> Now, believe it or not there was a time in recent history when a good ole fashioned slap and tickle between two rugged boys would be frowned upon by society. GASP!!!! We know! Who in their right minds would care if a cowboy chooses to cornhole his pal over a filly? We can't imagine…. We swear if Americans weren't so damned uptight about the gays, they might actually pull their collective wits about themselves and accomplish world peace. (Carpet, 2005)

Again sarcasm made light of the situation while simultaneously critiquing it. This quality of integrationist rhetoric took on its world-making aspect to the extent such sarcasm is a privileged form of speech in queer communities.

Apart from a different audience which privileges different modes such as sarcasm, integrationist rhetoric deployed around *Brokeback Mountain* seemed intrinsically a counterpublic strategy. Exposing the citationality inherent to the circulation model, this rhetorical strategy found expression mainly in responding to other existing discourse rather than positing ostensibly originary statements. This is important because world-making is a communal-collaborative project within a co-constitutive rhetorical situation. But such an egalitarian conceptualization does not discount the role of eloquence. This aspect of eloquence is described by Celeste Condit whereby a speaker is able to more clearly articulate the thoughts of others and becomes in a sense a rhetorical leader for that group. She writes,

> Eloquence is not a simple property. Its fundamental task is to take an incompletely spoken, fragmentary set of experiences and to articulate those experiences in a coherent set of relationships that nourishes a particular audience in a particular context, perhaps even moving them to new visions from old ones. (1997)

Following Condit, the eloquent integrationist rhetor takes the privileged qualities of integrationist rhetoric and the ideal goals, then puts them into words and arguments that articulate queer experiences in a particularly compelling way. In the integrationist discourse about *Brokeback Mountain*, this came most prominently in the form of an article in the *New York Review of Books* (*NYRB*).[10] While blog posts on *Brokeback Mountain* utilizing integrationist rhetoric existed from the beginning, a noticeable increase occurred in early February when the article was first released free on the

[10] Andy Towle's blog was another example of an eloquent integrationist circulated to some degree, as some examples above demonstrate. However, working within the blogging medium he lacked the wide audience of the *NYRB*.

Internet.[11] Intentionally, most of the quotes in this section so far have been selected from before the *NYRB* article to highlight the circulating nature of integrationist rhetoric, it did not originate with that article's author yet his medium's ability for wider circulation helped it spread beyond its original counterpublic community. Nonetheless, this popular meta-critical review of *Brokeback Mountain* and its critics was particularly eloquent. It concluded (with the widely cited statement),

> The real achievement of *Brokeback Mountain* is not that it tells a universal love story that happens to have gay characters in it, but that it tells a distinctively gay story that happens to be so well told that any feeling person can be moved by it. If you insist, as so many have, that the story of Jack and Ennis is OK to watch and sympathize with because they're not really homosexual—that they're more like the heart of America than like "gay people"—you're pushing them back into the closet whose narrow and suffocating confines Ang Lee and his collaborators have so beautifully and harrowingly exposed. (Mendelsohn, 2006)

This article made two important eloquent achievements. First it forwarded a specifically integrationist read of *Brokeback Mountain* highlighting the importance of gayness and the context of homophobia. Second, it articulated the specific implications of the assimilationist rhetoric in a way integrationist rhetors found eloquent and satisfying. The latter became very clear with the noticeable increase of integrationist posts in early February linking to this article along with high praise. The following post was typical in its praise of the author's eloquence:

[11] It has since become pay-access, but you can still view it at the Internet archive here: http://web.archive.org/web/20060205024027/http://www.nybooks.com/articles/18712

> I know I've been posting relentlessly about that 'lil gay cowboy movie that could, but this is by far the best article on *BROKEBACK MOUNTAIN* I've come upon. It's an essay from the New York Review of Books taking to task the (sometimes well-intentioned) reviewers who have called this a "universal" romance. It instead argues that *BROKEBACK MOUNTAIN* is specifically and undeniably about the gay experience…. The essay is pretty extensive and encompasses everything from the Ang Lee's visual metaphors, film theory and analyses of the performances to the film's marketing strategy and critical reception. The writer, Daniel Mendelsohn, *shares many of the same thoughts I had of the film, but is much more articulate than I.* (garçon, 2006, emphasis mine)

Given the relative lateness of Madelsohn's article, many bloggers were already aware of the universalizing strategy (consistent with assimilationist rhetoric) in mainstream reviews and interviews (as the above examples demonstrate). In that context this article really stood out and warranted praise due to its eloquent construction. Elsewhere:

> I read an article today… which shatters any expectations for a movie review. In fact, I wouldn't call it a movie review, as much as a highly poignant and relevant analysis which should probably be shipped as part of the package when the movie comes out on DVD. Not that it will be, but I do think it's that good…..
> Unfortunately, making something appeal to the mainstream often requires watering it down, and hence diluting its message. I don't think *Brokeback Mountain* itself has been diluted; but much of the cultural advocacy geared towards broadening its appeal has been. I didn't fully realize it myself until I read this article. (Webb, 2006)

In a circulation model of publics these posts served two world-making functions. In critiquing mainstream media and their respective larger publics, these bloggers identified a place for themselves against assimilationist rhetoric. Also, in championing the *NYRB* article, they acknowledged the eloquent essay as an exemplar of critical integrationist rhetoric and their linking to it (citationality) rhyzomatically constituted a circulating queer/integrationist counterpublic.

Others made similar efforts: "YES, ANOTHER "*BROKEBACK*" REVIEW -- BUT THIS ONE GETS IT RIGHT" (Ireland, 2006). The following blogger linked to the *NYRB* article then wrote,

> I think this relates to an experience that many gay people sometimes experience. It's often necessary to point out that straight stories/activities are assumed to be universal, while gay ones are specifically gay. They are accepted by the mainstream only when they are universalized (or, in the case of something like Will and Grace, so vapid as to be utterly worthless). It's like when I have to explain to people why I sometimes want to go to a gay bar. It's not to hook up with someone, but simply to be in a milieu that doesn't make assumptions. For me to go to a straight bar -- the one's assumed to be fit for all -- is the same as straight people going to a gay one. That's why gay bars so often include "straight-friendly" in their descriptions. It's an effort at universalizing in order to appease the masses who are uncomfortable with their own sexuality. In this case, universalizing also means normalizing which also means sanitizing. (Gross, 2001)

Here the author used the insights from the *NYBR* article to provide insight into gay experiences and the ways universalizing discourse could be harmful. As a result he

normalized gayness by de-normalizing straightness. Such normalizing of gayness could only be successful in a medium with fragmented audiences reaching a specific public. Blogs, then, were able to provide such a space for counterpublic discourse in a way large-scale print media could not.

4. Attention to Process

Besides simply enacting this world-making quality rhetorically, integrationist rhetoric attended closely to process as crucial to its world-making project. This differed from assimilationist rhetoric's focus on results in the ways detailed by the previous chapter (Academy Award wins and ticket sales, for example). While this is perhaps the least clearly articulated aspect of the integrationist bloggers, I believe it is a crucial one. By process, I mean the relation between present conditions and desired equality as well as the means to get there. In some ways the critical and world-making aspects served this fourth function. For integrationist rhetoric, process was seen in attention to the steps toward long-term goals, even if small. Criticism and world-making are procedural steps with goals pushing various degrees of establishing a more livable life.

One blogger attended to process by hypothesizing the result of encouraging others to take on the project of imagining gay characters as Annie Proulx and the other autuers did in creating *Brokeback Mountain*:

> When I first heard that *Brokeback Mountain* was being directed by a straight director from a script by straight writers and starring straight actors, I had a kneejerk moment of annoyance -- what could such a gaggle of heteros really know about the basic situation of these characters? It was a stupid, fleeting

> thought, but it nagged at me nonetheless. Good artists can imagine their way into all sorts of experiences beyond their own, and I've long thought gender and sexuality shouldn't limit artists of real worth. Indeed, I wish more straight writers would write about gay characters, at the very least because most of the straight writers I know have some gay friends or acquaintances, and yet the world in their fiction is entirely, and even obsessively, heterosexual. (Cheney, 2006)

If the goals of this integrationist rhetor can be identified as creating a more livable world for LGBT people, he posited a specific conception of one process that could help that world come about and praised *Brokeback* for attempting that process. Another writer responded to that idea:

> political & social considerations get in the way of such artistic risk-taking. What if a straight writer imagines a gay protagonist who also happens to be an asshole...? Is our straight writer now a homophobe for his or her trouble? Cheney's suggestion is alert & interesting, but it creates as many problems as it solves. But then I suppose that art isn't really about solving problems. (Wolfe, 2006)

This author highlighted the reason art is well suited to integrationist rhetoric. He was concerned about some implications of the previous writer's idea of process on this matter, but the conclusion seems to be that art is not about finding answers but opens up possibilities. In the end, that is the conception of process conceived in integrationist rhetoric.

Further, by enacting a continuous conversation of ideas, circulation is itself a process. If the goal of assimilationist rhetoric was teleological and focused on certain

ends such as Academy Award winds or a level of representation among television characters, integrationist rhetoric favored a self-affirming process. Since rhetoric is world-affirming, "in the deepest and most fundamental sense [it is] the *advocacy of realities*" (Brummett, 1999, p. 160, emphasis his), the very circulation of integrationist discourse opened up possibilities of recognition for LGBT lives. Integrationist rhetoric focused on processes such as this which had no teleological end. There was no delineable benchmark in the process of circulation; its only aim was its own continuation. Even if there was a goal, it was always a transitory one. One blogger identified this aspect of process by praising continued conversation. In response to the *NYRB* article,

> interesting article about how many critics who praise *Brokeback Mountain* are actually forcing the gay-ness of the story back into the closet. it's frightening to think of praise as negatively affecting something, taking away while it gives. but at least people are talkin' (Hollis, 2006)

Even though this author was at least ambivalent about the article's conclusions, he supported their continuing circulation and the process it involved.

Others more directly highlighted the limits of the assimilationist approach of setting benchmarks for success in a medium of representation. Here the author, a self-identified Southern African American man, recognized the inherent limitation of representation as a stand-in for process: there will always be another barrier.

> I guess I'll get on the *Brokeback* bandwagon, although I want to see a Black, gay couple on screen. I'm so tired of people discovering their homosexuality. From the reviews I've read, seems like the cowboys in this film just stumble upon the fact that they're gay. I want a movie with a strong Black gay character whose first

> line is . . . “I’ve always loved ass!” I’m sick of people just falling into homosexuality, when those of us who’ve known who we were gay for ages are out here making the shit happen every day. Educating ignorant-ass heterosexuals, fighting for our rights daily, standing up and being counted, voting, giving dollars! I’m also tired of the DL, which *Brokeback* seems to be about as well. (James, 2005)

The author understood the relevance and even personal need of finding representations of oneself and one’s community in media. He wanted to see himself represented more directly with black characters. Nonetheless, he highlighted the limits of such achievements at creating the kind of social change he sought and as such advocated other processes such as voting and strategic consumption as well.

Conclusions

To summarize, integrationist rhetoric on *Brokeback Mountain* was focused around foregrounding gayness, criticizing competing rhetorics, enacting queer world-making, and attending to process over results. These aspects differed significantly from assimilationist rhetoric, although I save a further analysis of such implications for the final chapter. Let me here briefly outline the limits and possibilities of integrationist rhetoric.

While the counterpublics model has some advantages, it is also inherently limiting in scope. A message configured for a specific counterpublic audience will not necessarily be as well received outside that public. So in the above examples, while the blog medium helped these messages reach and circulate within a queer/integrationist counterpublic,

they were not as well received by the larger publics. As the massive amount of assimilationist rhetoric analyzed in the previous chapter indicates, that rhetoric was wildly more successful if the measure is number of advocates.

Nonetheless, integrationist rhetoric held certain possibilities unavailable to other forms. For one, it shared several key characteristics with the predominant rhetoric used by anti-gay rhetors, a focus on the gay subjectivity and experience. While assimilationist rhetors downplayed the gayness of *Brokeback*, the predominantly Christian conservative writers who condemned the movie for its portrayal of homosexuality took special aim at its representation of gayness. So when anti-gay writers were put in dialogue with assimilationist rhetors, the result was non sequiter; neither side could draw a conclusion that the other party recognized from the evidence. If gayness was to be seen as important in a movie (as it was for anti-gay writers), the universalizing of assimilationist rhetoric could not account for that and the mainstream LGBT movement was left ceding gayness to the gay-haters. An integrationist rhetoric, on the other hand, could offer a supportive alternative by forwarding a queer world-making objective.

In the end, however, neither type of rhetoric discussed in the past two chapters could do it all. My purpose is not simply to advocate one over the other, but rather to highlight the strategic nature of rhetoric and its relation to the LGBT movement. To that end, my final chapter details further conclusions about the use of assimilationist and integrationist rhetoric within the LGBT movement and the implications they hold for scholars of the LGBT community.

CHAPTER FOUR

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS OF THE DISCURSIVE *BROKEBACK MOUNTAIN*(S)

Assimilationist and integrationist rhetoric each served different communities in the discourse surrounding *Brokeback Mountain*. In the terms of social movements set out in the first chapter, assimilationist rhetoric was a reformist strategy and integrationist rhetoric a revolutionary one. As the previous chapters demonstrate, such differences in rhetorical strategy can conjure drastically different results on many levels. Effective use of such rhetoric rests on more fully understanding those strategic limits and possibilities.

Assimilationist rhetoric on *Brokeback Mountain* served to popularize a gay-themed film by highlighting its universal connection to human emotions and mainstream values. But on the other hand, it did so at the expense of preventing a different/other/gay experience from be part of that universality. Also, assimilationist rhetoric set its scope on teleological goals and benchmarks. However, these goals are always insufficient, and indeed must be in order to maintain a status of deprivation necessary for any social movement. Overall, however, assimilationist rhetoric has proven to be uniquely capable of gaining a foothold in mainstream institutions. Integrationist rhetoric was focused on a project of queer world-making, but at the expense of a more palatable approach to mainstream audiences. Its goal was decidedly not teleological, but nor did it somehow eschew process and privilege the status quo. Rather, integrationist rhetoric was expressly critical and concerned itself with a continuous process of change, the implications of which I will expand on below.

In this concluding chapter I first look to the implications for public sphere theory. In that section I discuss the contributions of this project toward a better understanding of the connection between rhetoric and subjectivity. I look at the constitutive qualities of rhetoric as offering strategic possibilities that enable or constrain certain subjective possibilities. Next, I interrogate the implications of this project for the LGBT movement. I defend my choice to locate the key distinction of movement rhetoric at the level of strategy over other options. I also expand on the limits and possibilities of each rhetorical strategy for the practical needs of LGBT rhetors. Finally, in the last section I focus on the role of process within these rhetorics. In describing assimilationist rhetoric as teleological and integrationist rhetoric as based in continuous process, I argue that assimilationist rhetoric is limited to qualities of the quantifiable present and its constituted epistemological field. Integrationist rhetoric, rather, is capable of drawing on asystematic and contingent foundations in a way that offers greater opportunity for transformative conceptions of subjectivity.

Rhetoric, Public Sphere, and Subjectivity

The case studies looking at integrationist and assimilationist rhetoric around *Brokeback Mountain* seem to offer an important insight about the public sphere itself. Many scholars advocate that the public sphere *is* made up of multiple circulating publics and counterpublics. This is articulated against others who support a Habermasian ideal of unitary public sphere discourse. After looking at these two types of rhetoric and the model of public sphere they each take for granted, however, perhaps these totalizing claims about the public sphere must be tempered to less far-reaching structurations. Is it

really the public sphere that is changing, or the media through which it is articulated? Perhaps the answer seems obvious, and has even been address by other scholars (such as DeLuca & Peeples, 2002), but I would go further. Even these authors claim that the public sphere *is* changing and needs a supplemental concept (the public screen). But what if, in fully understanding the co-constitutive nature of rhetoric, the form of the public sphere is itself constituted for all practical purposes by the rhetoric in which it is evoked?

Let me explore the examples from this project. Since "all discourse or performance addressed to a public must characterize the world in which it attempts to circulate" (Warner, 2002, p. 114), all rhetoric is world-making. Each type of rhetoric addressed in this thesis attempted to constitute a particular understanding of the public sphere. Each foundation also constituted different understandings of what counts as success and different measures to achieve it. The assumptions of assimilationist rhetoric worked to exploit movement from margin to center of a singular public sphere; integrationist rhetoric assumed multiple smaller publics and affirmed circulation itself as success over bodily inclusion within the public sphere per se. Even if the assumptions of assimilationist rhetoric do not account for modern media and the public screen, they do not lose their ability to succeed, as my second chapter demonstrated with the example of *Brokeback Mountain*. Rather, I argue that it is the very ability of rhetoric to strategically frame the field of debate that allows different (even conflicting) approaches to succeed in different settings. Let me now further explore that constitutive quality of rhetoric and its implications for the publics sphere and subjectivity.

The connection between publics and rhetoric largely revolves around subjectivity: which subjective positions are made possible, which are denigrated and excluded, etc.

This is not simply a question of mainstream publics and marginalized (counter)publics, however. Robert Asen argues that any counterpublic claiming to speak "for" an excluded group is necessarily excluding some of those for whom it speaks in an attempt to gain discursive legitimacy. The problem Asen sees in this is that envisioning the public sphere as functioning effectively when it enables the inclusion of more voices often makes people appear as representations though not actually present (p 364). In other words, different rhetorics presume not just a certain kind of state, but a certain kind of participant. They are co-constitutive; the participant articulates a public discourse through rhetoric which in turn influences the subjective possibilities of the participant. Further, the relation between state and subject is constituted as a presumed field of the public sphere. If you want to participate, you must fit the established understanding of "subject." We must understand all these constitutive levels in order to gauge the limits and possibilities of any political rhetoric.

Warner believes that the rhetoric of identity politics "presuppose[s] the bourgeois public sphere as background…. [But] it would be naïve and sentimental to suppose that identities or mere assertions of status will precipitate from this crisis as its solution, since the public discourse makes identity an ongoing problem" (2002, pp. 185-186). Basically, he argues that identity is continually problematized through discourse, so making essentializing claims is counterproductive. However, Warner does not give enough credit to the other constitutive force at work. While discourse constitutes subjects in problematized ways, subjects also apply a constitutive force on the discourse within which they work. Further, as Gayatri Spivak has argued, "it is not possible not to be an essentialist, one can self-consciously use this irreducible moment of essentialism as part

of one's strategy" (2001, p. 402). Since it is impossible not to make essentializing statements, one may put them to use strategically, although Spivak refuses to privilege either self-conscious or unself-conscious use.[12]

In sum, the rhetorical situation is co-constitutive; it is not premised on interpellation or essentiality, but on articulation. As a result, we must look at identity as neither fully determined nor fully foreclosed. As Biesecker argues, "the subject is a historical construct precisely because its 'unique' and always provisional identity depends upon its operation within a system of differences and the larger movement of *différance*" (1999, p. 242). In that case, Warner's critique of lesbian/gay rhetoric fails because his argument (that it is an identity politics in a post-identity media sphere) lacks full coherence. Certainly if such rhetoric sees itself as representing an essential identity, it misses the point, but that does not mean that it is fully unable to achieve relevance either. Identity is still part of the equation regardless of which point it is constituted (prior, during, or after) with regard to the rhetorical situation. A more Butlerian politics seems appropriate, however, one based upon contingent foundations of identity and a multiplicity of intersecting interests. Contesting foundationalism is not to foreclose politics, however. As Butler writes in a seminal essay,

> To claim that the subject is constituted is not to claim that it is determined; on the contrary, the constituted character of the subject is the very precondition of its agency. For what is it that enables a purposive and significant reconfiguration of cultural and political relations, if not a relation that can be turned against itself, reworked, resisted? (1992, pp. 12-13)

[12] Spivak has come to dislike the term "strategic essentialism" as it has been utilized to evoke a conscious strategy while concealing the more important fact that it is impossible not to essentialize.

That resignifying process is the work of politics according to Butler. It is integrationist rhetoric which is again more capable of functioning in a task of constituting new subjective possibilities such a politics requires.

If the rhetorical situation is co-constitutive, then it must also enable groups and individuals to influence their subjectivity and the world as well. Poststructuralist theorists are particularly fascinated by these questions and, despite claims of many critics, have done much to show how, while certainly not an unrestrained, subjects may form some level of agency. (In particular, Butler and the late works of Foucault are concerned with these questions). So it seems that conceptions of the public sphere as multiple circulation publics must step back from their structurating tendency and allow for a more constitutive view of the public sphere. Its structure is not determined (either as singular or multiple), rather *it is constituted through practices of rhetoric and subjectivity.*

Let me expand now on specifically how this relation between subjectivity and rhetoric fits into discussions of the public sphere. Kendall Phillips (2002) uses Foucault to show how "spaces of dissention" (a term from Foucault, but similar to dissent in the sense of Phillip's own previous work described in chapter one) can be seen as intentional spaces. Foucault describes these places as emergent contradictions and since these contradictions must be "overcome," we see the invention of new discourses. As Phillips puts it, "Contradictions, thus, operate as the limit points of discourse, the points where coherence and enforced regularity of 'normal' discourse encounters the incompatibility of changing symbolic and material conditions" (p. 334). It is the very instability and uncertainty of these points which allows for Foucault's notion of freedom. Rejecting resistance in the traditional sense of reversing power relations (for which it merely

reconstitutes new ones), Foucault locates freedom in the fractures of discourse where no clear path is apparent. Phillips summarizes Foucault's position, the possibilities of self-invention, and its relevance for public dissent:

> Dissention is not a new discourse, but the process of subjecting old and new discourses to a reflective/intentional pause. Freedom is not the reversal of power relations, but the reflective/inventive moment before such a reversal. And, thought is not the emergence of a new subjectivity, but the reflection on one's self and one's actions as a problem and the intentional moment before some new way of living comes forth. (p. 339)

In a public sphere where dissent is the very mode of participation, this reflection of intentional possibilities is an important indication of how publics can interact toward productive goals. Failing to understand it may either serve to hinder discussion among publics or recenter consensus and the model of implementing new discourses of domination and exclusion.

LGBT Movement Rhetoric

In this thesis I have located the key distinction for rhetoric in the LGBT movement as one of strategy, between assimilationist and integrationist rhetoric. My purpose has been to demonstrate the importance of being conscious of this distinction in order to fully understand their strategic value. This choice of distinction at rhetorical strategy results in certain conceptions of actual rhetorical possibilities. As I outlined in the first chapter, Michael Warner locates the difference elsewhere and comes to similar but different distinctions. For him, the key differences are: refusing/embracing sexual

stigma, rejecting/implementing identitarian politics, and relation to the state and/or other publics. My focus on assimilationist or integrationist rhetorical strategy does not necessarily disagree with the importance of his conclusions. Although assimilationists will tend to embrace mainstream society's versions of sexual stigma, they do not have to in order to still implement an assimilationist rhetorical strategy. Likewise, while integrationists will tend to be critical of an identity politics, they may implement it nonetheless while forwarding the importance of queer experience as central to their strategy. For Warner, on the other hand, his queer politics is fully "the antithesis of identity politics" (1999, p. 75). Finally, modern mediated society has become so enmeshed in forms of circulation and interpublic discourse that any distinction based on attitude toward state/other publics seems irrelevant. Everything in assimilationist and integrationist rhetoric is focused at other public(s), whether it is toward the center of a singular public (assimilationist) or other larger mainstream publics (integrationist).

Warner eschews a distinction of strategy because he sees it as overlooking the implications for identity. He claims the difference is "not simply strategic because each posture toward the state and toward the public sphere has strong links with a different rhetoric of identity and sexuality" (2002, p. 212). I agree that the rhetoric of identity is of central concern for sexual minority publics. Yet I also believe that rhetorical strategy is the best way to implement that understanding. As I discussed in the previous section, rhetoric has a constitutive influence on the rhetorical situation and the subjectivities available in a given discursive formation.

Let me expand on the strategic value for each rhetoric. Popularized by major organizations from the HRC to GLAAD, assimilationist rhetoric has proven very capable

of gaining entrance to mainstream institutions. Especially with regard to corporations, the HRC has had great success lobbying major organizations to include LGBT-friendly policies. Likewise, the influence of GLAAD on Hollywood and the major television networks has only grown since it has developed a consistent assimilationist rhetoric. These are strategic values that cannot be ignored.

Nonetheless, assimilationist rhetoric cannot do everything. For example, if assimilationist rhetoric is placed in an argument against religious gay bashing of *Brokeback Mountain*, it can only achieve rhetorical acceptance of the *movie* at the expense of the acceptance of a unique and different LGBT *experience*. Assimilationist rhetoric is more of an attempt to uphold the consistent application of liberal humanism, not to argue that gay people per se are fine. Assimilationist rhetoric attempts to preempt attacks on LGBT rights altogether by evoking the humanist frame of argument. When *responding* to attacks, however, where the discursive field has already been established as one based on difference, assimilationist rhetoric is unable to adequately defend LGBT subjectivities.

Integrationist rhetoric is much more suited to the aim of affirming explicitly LGBT lives. Assimilationist rhetoric only acknowledges anything gay when it comes to counting awards. It would not work to say "*Brokeback Mountain* is the first universal love story to be nominated for eight Oscars!" This strategic use of difference is strongly related to the different measures of success for each rhetoric and the path to get there. Simons identifies the different restraints on success for reformist and revolutionary rhetors,

> Militants [revolutionaries] thrive on injustice and ineptitude by the larger structure. Should the enemy fail to implement the movement's demands, the militant is vindicated ideologically, yet frustrated programmatically…. The moderate [reformist], by contrast, requires tangible evidence that the larger structure is tractable in order to hold followers in line; yet "too much" success belies the movement's reason for being. (1999, p. 391)

Each rhetoric must recognize these limits in order to most effectively work toward mutual goals.

Yet while assimilationist rhetoric is overtly drawn to universalizing tactics within the humanist tradition, integrationist rhetoric deals in its own form of universal, albeit an implicit one. Judith Butler rejects the idea that there is a universally shared human condition, but argues for a "tenuous 'we'" as a place to begin (2003, p. 20). According to Butler, "each of us is constituted politically in part by virtue of the social vulnerability of our bodies" (Butler, 2003). We are all united in our vulnerability, it is just that some communities are more vulnerable than others, such as those articulated by *Brokeback Mountain*. Integrationist rhetoric deeply understood this form of the universal. Whereas assimilationist rhetoric sought to make the characters of *Brokeback* humanly grievable by universalizing them, integrationist rhetoric attempted to expand the notion of the human in order to make the characters of *Brokeback Mountain* grievable. It is this question of grievability that drives the recent work of Butler. In *Undoing Gender* (2004a) she writes, "we must learn to live and to embrace the destruction and rearticulation of the human in the name of a more capacious and, finally, less violent world, not knowing in advance what precise form our humanness does and will take" (p. 35). Butler calls for us to

"queer" our notion of the human as an essential task in creating a more livable life for all, including LGBT people.

Importantly, integrationist rhetoric is not the same as the more militant queer project of the 1980s and 90s of which Warner describes. That type of rhetoric is indeed, as Warner laments, largely gone from the LGBT movement at present. I will not go so far as to claim integrationist rhetoric has taken its place, but if any social movement needs both reformist and revolutionary rhetors, integrationists are currently the revolutionaries to assimilationist reformers. At least, that is, if assimilationist and integrationist rhetoric on *Brokeback Mountain* can be extended as representative of the movement writ large.

But what is the purpose of this more radical rhetoric? One of the most important functions of any marginal discourse is that of critique. DeLuca and Peeples write that, "For a cultural critic, the key response to the structural transformations of our moment is neither to adopt a moral pose nor to express yearnings for a mythical past, but to explore what is happening and what is possible under current conditions" (2002, p. 134). While Warner seems at times to yearn for the mythical past of queer rhetoric, a central tenet of the integrationist rhetoric on *Brokeback Mountain* was to understand how different rhetorical strategies functioned. Most prominently, the meta-critical *New York Review of Books* essay and its circulators set about articulating the discursive ramifications of assimilationist rhetoric in mainstream press. Exploring Foucault's work on critique, Judith Butler argues that the point is "to establish critique as the very practice that exposes the limits of [an] epistemological horizon" (2004b, p. 310). That is exactly what integrationist rhetors did in critiquing assimilationist assumptions; they exposed their limit as one of dehumanizing gayness. Yet Butler acknowledges the necessity of

reconstituting practices of self-transformation that must supplement the negating description of a critique. She writes, “there is no possibility of accepting or refusing a rule without a self who is stylized in response to the ethical demand upon it” (p. 311). This is why the world-making quality of integrationist rhetoric is key. Beyond a critique of assimilationist rhetoric, it must also pose an alternative and work to constitute new subjective possibilities for LGBT lives.

Peaking Beyond the *Mountain*top

There are a few final comments I wish to explore as future vistas warranting attention by the conclusions of this project. In the previous section, integrationist rhetoric’s focus on foregrounding gayness, critique, and world-making have been shown to fit well with extant scholarship on queer and poststructuralist discursive priorities, while still leaving room for practical achievements of assimilationist strategies. I move now to the fourth quality of integrationist rhetoric: its attention to process without telos. In this final section I discuss some limits of teleological claims such as those of assimilationist rhetoric and why rhetorical claims seeking process with no identifiable end-game hold certain possibilities unavailable to telos.

First, let me clarify the distinction. As they both deal with some form of process, the key factor lies in their goals. Assimilationist rhetoric is teleological in that it used measures such as mainstream ticket sales and award wins as goals. The goal-limit maintains teleological rhetoric’s connection to quantifiable measures and material means. Integrationist rhetoric has as its goal a world-making project of queer subjectivity. This goal is never measurable or quantifiable. Integrationist rhetors were unconcerned with

award wins, for example, because they could continue to exist as a (social) movement in time regardless of that constituting future-limit.

Identifying a measurable goal is in essence a structurating move; it establishes a present, a future, and the specific path connecting them. There is a delineable structure established in advance that allows (even forces) the establishment of certain schemes of measurability. In other words, certain measures allow certain goals, certain subjects, and certain futures. Others remain unthinkable within the epistemological field of that structure. Integrationists, rather, were very concerned with the instant. For example, the focus on visceral attraction to *Brokeback Mountain*'s actors was a moment of pure immanent desire, a constitutive force disconnected from a structurating impulse. For Deleuze, "desire is wholly a part of a functioning heterogeneous assemblage. It is a process, as opposed to a structure or a genesis. It is an affect as opposed to a feeling" (2006, p. 130). Integrationist rhetors' embrace of desire forwarded the process of world-making excess which leaked through normalizing structures. Where assimilationists constituted their politics on a foundation of concrete goals, integrationists founded a politics of the instant which embraced desire (as opposed to pleasure, a structurating force according to Deleuze). By closing off process with an end, a limit, a goal, one serves to structuralize it. Teleological rhetoric is, in this sense, an inherently structural rhetoric. While structures are to a certain extent necessary, and even Butler calls for *contingent* foundations to achieve political ends, they are fundamentally limiting as well.

I discussed in the first section the way rhetoric is constitutive of subjectivity through discourse. Now I can problematize that further, as each form of process can influence subjective possibilities. If, as I argue above, subjective possibilities are limited

by the form of public sphere constituted in an argument, so too are they limited by its procedural structures. Telos works within its structural limits. Teleological rhetoric can only constitute subjects in relation to a goal, actualizing identities procedurally linked to a future world. These limits were exposed by integrationist critics on *Brokeback Mountain* as that of a liberal humanist identity. Telos works as a mountain; there is a peak which, once reached, necessitated a stop (or reversal). Non-teleological procedural rhetoric such as integrationist rhetoric does not constitute its path (structure) in advance. Without a clear goal (a process of actualization) in place, the subjective possibilities remain unrestricted by forms and structures, rooted in perpetual becoming, a truly queer concept.

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